



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, November 17, 2021

Day 127

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Second Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UC), Speaker
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Milliken, Nicholas, Calgary-Currie (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)
Allard, Tracy L., Grande Prairie (UC)
Amery, Mickey K., Calgary-Cross (UC)
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Jackie,
Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (Ind)
Bilous, Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Copping, Hon. Jason C., Calgary-Varsity (UC)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP),
Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (NDP),
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
Dreeshen, Devin, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC)
Eggen, David, Edmonton-North West (NDP),
Official Opposition Whip
Ellis, Hon. Mike, Calgary-West (UC)
Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Fir, Hon. Tanya, Calgary-Peigan (UC)
Frey (formerly Glasgo), Michaela L., Brooks-Medicine Hat (UC)
Ganley, Kathleen T., Calgary-Mountain View (NDP)
Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UC)
Glubish, Hon. Nate, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UC)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UC)
Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP),
Official Opposition House Leader
Guthrie, Peter F., Airdrie-Cochrane (UC)
Hanson, David B., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
Hoffman, Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)
Horner, Hon. Nate S., Drumheller-Stettler (UC)
Hunter, Grant R., Taber-Warner (UC)
Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP),
Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Issik, Hon. Whitney, Calgary-Glenmore (UC),
Government Whip
Jones, Matt, Calgary-South East (UC)
Kenney, Hon. Jason, PC, Calgary-Lougheed (UC),
Premier
LaGrange, Hon. Adriana, Red Deer-North (UC)
Loewen, Todd, Central Peace-Notley (Ind)
Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UC)
Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UC)
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)
Luan, Hon. Jason, Calgary-Foothills (UC)
Madu, Hon. Kaycee, QC, Edmonton-South West (UC)
McIver, Hon. Ric, Calgary-Hays (UC)

Nally, Hon. Dale, Morinville-St. Albert (UC)
Neudorf, Nathan T., Lethbridge-East (UC)
Nicolaidis, Hon. Demetrios, Calgary-Bow (UC)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
Nixon, Hon. Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (UC),
Government House Leader
Nixon, Jeremy P., Calgary-Klein (UC)
Notley, Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (NDP),
Leader of the Official Opposition
Orr, Hon. Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (UC)
Pancholi, Rakhi, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)
Panda, Hon. Prasad, Calgary-Edgemont (UC)
Phillips, Shannon, Lethbridge-West (NDP)
Pon, Hon. Josephine, Calgary-Beddington (UC)
Rehn, Pat, Lesser Slave Lake (UC)
Reid, Roger W., Livingstone-Macleod (UC)
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)
Rosin, Miranda D., Banff-Kananaskis (UC)
Rowswell, Garth, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright (UC)
Rutherford, Brad, Leduc-Beaumont (UC),
Deputy Government Whip
Sabir, Irfan, Calgary-McCall (NDP),
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Savage, Hon. Sonya, Calgary-North West (UC)
Sawhney, Hon. Rajan, Calgary-North East (UC)
Schmidt, Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (NDP)
Schow, Joseph R., Cardston-Siksika (UC),
Deputy Government House Leader
Schulz, Hon. Rebecca, Calgary-Shaw (UC)
Schweitzer, Hon. Doug, QC, Calgary-Elbow (UC)
Shandro, Hon. Tyler, QC, Calgary-Acadia (UC)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-City Centre (NDP)
Sigurdson, Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)
Sigurdson, R.J., Highwood (UC)
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP)
Toews, Hon. Travis, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)
Toor, Devinder, Calgary-Falconridge (UC)
Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC)
Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UC)
Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UC)
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, Calgary-North (UC)
Vacant, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche

Party standings:

United Conservative: 20

New Democrat: 24

Independent: 2

Vacant: 1

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

Shannon Dean, QC, Clerk
Teri Cherkewich, Law Clerk
Trafton Koenig, Senior Parliamentary
Counsel
Philip Massolin, Clerk Assistant and
Director of House Services

Nancy Robert, Clerk of *Journals* and
Committees
Janet Schwegel, Director of Parliamentary
Programs
Amanda LeBlanc, Deputy Editor of
Alberta Hansard

Chris Caughell, Sergeant-at-Arms
Tom Bell, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Paul Link, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms

Executive Council

Jason Kenney	Premier, President of Executive Council, Minister of Intergovernmental Relations
Jason Copping	Minister of Health
Mike Ellis	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions
Tanya Fir	Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction
Nate Glubish	Minister of Service Alberta
Nate Horner	Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development
Whitney Issik	Associate Minister of Status of Women
Adriana LaGrange	Minister of Education
Jason Luan	Minister of Community and Social Services
Kaycee Madu	Minister of Justice and Solicitor General
Ric McIver	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Dale Nally	Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity
Demetrios Nicolaides	Minister of Advanced Education
Jason Nixon	Minister of Environment and Parks
Ronald Orr	Minister of Culture
Prasad Panda	Minister of Infrastructure
Josephine Pon	Minister of Seniors and Housing
Sonya Savage	Minister of Energy
Rajan Sawhney	Minister of Transportation
Rebecca Schulz	Minister of Children's Services
Doug Schweitzer	Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation
Tyler Shandro	Minister of Labour and Immigration
Travis Toews	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
Rick Wilson	Minister of Indigenous Relations
Muhammad Yaseen	Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism

Parliamentary Secretaries

Martin Long	Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Tourism
-------------	--

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Rowswell
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jones

Allard
Eggen
Gray
Hunter
Phillips
Rehn
Singh

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Neudorf
Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring

Armstrong-Homeniuk
Barnes
Bilous
Frey (formerly Glasgo)
Irwin
Rosin
Rowswell
Sweet
van Dijken
Walker

Select Special Child and Youth Advocate Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Schow
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jones

Goehring
Lovely
Nixon, Jeremy
Pancholi
Sabir
Smith
Turton

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Lovely
Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

Amery
Carson
Frey (formerly Glasgo)
Gotfried
Hunter
Loewen
Pancholi
Reid
Sabir
Smith

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Milliken

Allard
Ceci
Long
Loyola
Rosin
Shepherd
Smith
Sweet
van Dijken

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Cooper
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schow

Allard
Dang
Deol
Goehring
Long
Neudorf
Sabir
Sigurdson, R.J.
Williams

Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon

Amery
Dang
Frey (formerly Glasgo)
Irwin
Long
Nielsen
Rehn
Rosin
Sigurdson, L.

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Smith
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

Aheer
Armstrong-Homeniuk
Deol
Ganley
Gotfried
Loyola
Neudorf
Renaud
Stephan
Williams

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Ms Phillips
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

Armstrong-Homeniuk
Lovely
Pancholi
Renaud
Rowswell
Schmidt
Singh
Toor
Turton
Walker

Select Special Committee on Real Property Rights

Chair: Mr. Sigurdson
Deputy Chair: Mr. Rutherford

Frey (formerly Glasgo)
Ganley
Hanson
Milliken
Nielsen
Rowswell
Schmidt
Sweet
van Dijken
Yao

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Hanson
Deputy Chair: Member Ceci

Dach
Feehan
Ganley
Getson
Guthrie
Lovely
Rehn
Singh
Turton
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, November 17, 2021

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Statement by the Speaker

Alert Ready Emergency System Test

The Speaker: Hon. members, prior to the commencement of Members' Statements, this is a reminder, pursuant to the memo that you would have all received yesterday and, I'm sure, all reviewed thoroughly, that this afternoon at 1:55, during Oral Question Period, the alert ready emergency system is scheduled to be tested in Alberta and across Canada. Please turn off – not to silent but turn off – all electronic devices to avoid a disruption in the proceedings. Now, I did have the pleasure of attending the Canada versus Mexico soccer game last night, learned a lot from the officiating crew there. Consider this your yellow card, and if there is a disruption, the red card will come out, and the consequences will be swift.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East has a statement to make.

Canadian Men's National Soccer Team

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last night I was able to watch Team Canada win 2-1 over Mexico at Commonwealth Stadium in a World Cup qualification match. It was incredible. I love soccer, and I love Canada. To see those come together right here in Edmonton on a classic winter evening, resulting in a win over a team ranked in the top 10 of the world in 2020, was a historic moment.

We should be proud of all of our national teams across every sport. The young men and women who have dedicated themselves to train and compete for years to reach events like this are inspiring and worthy of celebration. Their effort encourages Albertan children to dream and aspire to emulate their local heroes and pursue excellence like the incredible local talent of Alphonso Davies, who has played all around the world and was playing last night in front of his hometown and home province.

Mr. Speaker, soccer has become one of the most popular sports in Canada and the number one most played sport by Albertan youth. I have played and coached soccer for many years, as have many in this Chamber. It is a beautiful game with many forms, from the structured attack of many European teams to the free-flowing style of Latin and South American teams. It is played at a high level by nearly every African nation as well as those down under and all the way to Asia and right around the world. It is accessible and affordable, making it an ideal sport for children everywhere, but it is not easy. Hundreds of teams are fighting for the chance to play on the world stage, and Canada took a huge step forward last night, catapulting themselves into first place in the CONCACAF group in the qualification stage.

Mr. Speaker, I send my sincere congratulations to Team Canada on their success and wish them all the best on their remaining qualification games, and congrats to Team Mexico for a hard-fought effort. Thank you to all the Albertans who came out this past week, especially last night, to support both Team Canada and Team Mexico and make this a hugely successful event.

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

Rural Bus Service

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are watching their vital services regularly cut, consolidated, red-carded, and moved further and further away. Today I want to talk about one such vital service provider, Cold Shot. Cold Shot is an Edmonton-based intercity bus service that celebrated their third anniversary serving Albertans this month by taking over 11 of Greyhound's rural routes in Alberta and into northern B.C.

But they might not be able to get to a fourth anniversary. Through the pandemic Cold Shot has provided transportation for more than 30 communities in rural Alberta. In fact, they're the only bus service operating between Edmonton, Cold Lake, and Peace River. They're the only service helping many rural Albertans who are too old to drive, not able to afford insurance or gain access to cars. To make it very clear, Mr. Speaker, Cold Shot is the only way for many to get medical help after the government's failed leadership has effectively driven out doctors from the province, leaving rural Albertans no choice but to travel many hours for a basic human right.

When the owner of Cold Shot came to ask the government for help to survive the devastating impact of the pandemic, one would think the government was ready to do whatever they could to help them. Well, they didn't. They only told the business to apply for the federal government's emergency funding and continued with their lives while Cold Shot was thanked by the B.C. government with a grant that's helped it survive the economic effect of COVID-19, unsolicited. They are sorely ignored by their own government.

How can this government be willing to accept their local businesses, providing essential services, dying a painful death while they boast about their amazing economic recovery? For a government that loves parading about how much they care about rural Alberta, they seem very content to leave rural Alberta stranded, quite literally, Mr. Speaker. With \$4.7 billion going to major corporations, a \$1.3 billion bet on the KXL pipeline, and nothing for local businesses, rural Alberta borders on the brink of extinction.

Thank you.

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

Front-line Workers' Mental Health

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently I had the opportunity to meet with the spouse of a first responder whose husband suffered a debilitating workplace injury. She was bravely advocating for change as she relayed her story and the impact this injury has had on not only her partner but on her whole family. Her advocacy extended beyond herself, including a plea to improve conditions for others so that no one else would have to experience the horror of seeing the person you love the most change before your eyes. The emotional trauma extended beyond the injured individual, impacting everybody around them.

That injury is posttraumatic stress disorder, PTSD, and it is more prevalent and damaging than many know. In addition to everyday challenges, we must think about the added exposure to traumatic events that this pandemic has caused. As front-line workers they are highly exposed to the virus itself. They make impossible decisions and work extended hours under extreme conditions. According to Stats Canada, eight months into the pandemic one-third of participating health care workers reported fair or poor mental health. One-third. Seventy per cent of participating health care workers said that their mental health was worse compared to before March 2020.

Imagine how those numbers would look today. Many have experienced signs of PTSD, which can develop after an individual has experienced, witnessed, or been repeatedly exposed to significant trauma.

In addition to PTSD, the potential traumatic events that health care workers and front-line responders will likely experience during the pandemic can also lead to depression, anxiety, and other significant mental health concerns, including moral injury, compassion fatigue, traumatic grief, and burnout. We also can't forget about the impact this injury has on families and loved ones and work to find ways to support all impacted. Our health care workers and first responders have supported us through this crisis. Now is the time to create supports to protect their mental well-being going forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Economic Recovery

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the economy, this Premier is making the same mistake that he does over and over again when it comes to COVID, declaring victory when there's still so much more work to do. Now, the investments announced last week are definitely good for the economy, no question. The hard-working people of this province are giving everything they have to get us out of this recession, but as the Premier celebrates like his job is done, he must acknowledge how much more there is to do.

Let's look a little closer at the Premier's claims. Yes, Alberta is seeing job growth, and that is good. However, unlike most other provinces, we have not recovered to our prepandemic employment levels. Moreover, Mr. Speaker, that's actually a very low bar. The Premier forgets that before the pandemic hit, his government had doubled the deficit, shrunk the economy, and lost 50,000 jobs.

Now, the Premier says that our economic growth rate is leading the country, and that is also true, but here's the part he leaves out. We also led the country in economic contraction, so we need that growth rate because we have so much more ground to make up. Even with our growth rate, the forecasts he cites don't have us recovering to our prepandemic levels until the middle of next year at the earliest. Meanwhile other major provinces are expected to recover their GDP this year.

The Premier says that it's the best year ever for tech – also true – but it's the best tech year everywhere. Tech is booming, and every Canadian jurisdiction has seen massive growth rates, rates that far outstrip Alberta's.

No, I won't rain on his parade; I just don't think he should be throwing one yet. It's simply too early for a one-man victory party. There are hundreds of thousands of Albertans who need help. The Premier needs to focus on their jobs instead of making misleading claims to save his own.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River has the call.

1:40 COP 26 Climate Change Conference and Federal Energy Policies

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We recently watched government leaders from around the world gather in Glasgow for COP 26, a conference where the world's elite tell the rest of us how we need to give up our WestJet companion vouchers and eat less Alberta beef, a typical day in PM J.T.'s agenda. Rather than living as they would have their subjects live, our country's leaders packed their suitcases and their Spider-Man costumes and flew to Scotland. As blue-collar Albertans are being told to shut down their trucks and livelihoods for the sake of our climate, our Prime Minister had

no problem joining hundreds of world leaders flying across the globe in private jets also for the climate.

Trudeau, along with his newly minted, building-climbing Spider-Man Minister of Environment and Climate Change, M. Guilbeault, has led Canada to spin a web of empty pledges, willing to do whatever it takes to virtue-signal to the world that we are addressing climate change in a way that satisfies the little emperors of COP 26. Regardless of how many blue-collar jobs are lost or how many Albertans will struggle to feed their families, Canada must trust the judgment of a man who gained his fame by performative climate change theatre. It seems not much has changed for Mr. Guilbeault in his new role. Prime Minister Trudeau likes his performance.

The Alberta NDP seems to like it, too. The Leader of the Opposition, the former Premier, literally shared the stage with her dangling hero in 2015 to applaud a new carbon tax and emissions cap on Canada's economic engine, Alberta's oil and gas sector. The NDP's favourite performer is taking up a new role since his box-office flop as Spider-Man turned into four walls and a window with bars. He's now playing at Canada's Ministry of Environment and Climate Change.

However, this storyline will not be a comedy. Unfortunately, this is shaping up to be a Greek tragedy, with the sad death being our Canadian economy and Alberta's oil and gas sector. Mr. Speaker, the former Premier has exited stage way left of public opinion. The drama teacher is now the jet-setting producer, and Albertans have seen this movie before. No, thank you.

Arts and Culture Industries

Ms Goehring: Mr. Speaker, last week I had the pleasure of spending time in Calgary to meet with artists, venues, and professionals from all over our creative community. We discussed difficulties that they have experienced over the last 20 months due to the pandemic and the gaps in supports that they need filled in the future. Places like Art Commons, which is a dynamic artistic ecosystem when it comes to nurturing and stewarding a large community of organizations and artists, a one-stop shop, if you will, for so many different art forms for people to experience and for artists to showcase.

Mr. Speaker, let me tell you that speaking to these community members was a roller coaster of emotions. They spoke about the inspiring ways artists and industry shifted to bring art to Albertans during the pandemic and, in the same breath, the utter lack of creativity this government has had in supporting them. They spoke about the radio silence they're experiencing from this minister's office, and they spoke about the fear that they have for the future of art in this province. I'm truly concerned that this minister stood in this very House claiming to support this community and consult with them when he introduced legislation that will directly affect artists' lives but was unable to name any member of the community here only days later.

Mr. Speaker, our province needs art, and we need to support the members of the industry that make it, all members. I hope this government can improve their performance immediately. Our arts and our culture are far too important to ignore.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

Teacher Accountability

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week the Minister of Education announced Bill 85, Education Statutes (Students First) Amendment Act, 2021. This legislation will increase transparency

and accountability in the teaching profession, ensure parents are informed, and keep our students safe in schools.

Back in 2019, after a multiyear process, the Alberta Teachers' Association finally reprimanded a gym teacher for filming two teenage girls during class on his personal phone without the permission of the girls or their parents. Despite the students asking their teacher to stop, he claimed to be recording with the permission of one of their parents as a means of proving lack of participation in his class. However, during the investigation the parent in question denied this claim, and subsequently the teacher pled guilty to four charges of unprofessional conduct.

Despite there being no denial that the violation occurred, the ATA found that the teacher's actions were minor to moderate, slapped him with a \$500 fine for all four charges, and ordered him to write an apology to one of the students' parents. As a result of the incident, one student was pulled from the school to avoid contact with the teacher. This student effectively lost their constitutional right to a choice in education, and the teacher is still teaching at the same school.

Also, in 2018, when the NDP were in government, I asked their Minister of Education about the dismissal of a local principal without any consultation or reason given to the students or parents. At the time he chalked it up to a human resources issue and refused to comment about the situation. The minister admitted in this Assembly that an investigation was occurring but refused to provide any details on what this very popular principal was accused of.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta parents demand and deserve transparency, especially in matters as serious as disciplining teachers. I'm happy to see that we are finally lifting the curtain on this process and protecting students. It's time for parties on both sides – the ATA and all teachers and system leaders – to come together, put students first, and prioritize the quality and safety and professional conduct in the classroom and severely reprimand those in breach of that professional conduct.

Disaster Preparedness

Member Ceci: B.C. has been struck by devastating flooding that has washed out basic infrastructure, severing road and rail ties between our western neighbour and the rest of the country. This comes after B.C. suffered extreme wildfires this past summer that destroyed entire communities. Just as some of them were rebuilding from these fires, they were struck again by recent floods. My heart goes out to everyone who has been impacted by these disasters, and I know Alberta will be there to assist in any way we can.

While we watch the recovery efforts in B.C., we know that Alberta is not immune to these types of disasters. In the last 10 years there has been a devastating fire in Slave Lake, multiple floods and hailstorms in Calgary, and Fort McMurray has had two floods and, of course, the 2016 wildfire. Unfortunately, we will continue to see these types of disasters as our climate continues to change, which highlights the importance of disaster preparedness and the need to do more.

However, we have seen the opposite from the UCP. They've reduced our capacity to predict wildfires. Instead of following the recommendations following the Fort McMurray fire for a new, purpose-built Provincial Operations Centre, the UCP cut corners. They also cut the rappel firefighting unit, our first line of defence against wildfires, and they made a mess of municipalities' dispatch systems. Finally, they have made cuts to the disaster recovery program that download costs on to municipalities while cutting the amount of support Albertans can receive at their most desperate hour. In sum, the UCP government has cut across the entire disaster

preparedness continuum, all the way from prevention to response to recovery.

I've been hearing concerns from municipal leaders about how these cuts will leave Albertans and their communities vulnerable. Many of these municipal leaders from across the province are meeting over the next two weeks in Edmonton. They will be bringing these concerns forward as well as solutions. I hope this government is willing to take out the earplugs and listen.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Emergency Medical Services

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Like the rest of our health care system, the EMS system is currently under incredible strain. In my riding of Chestermere-Strathmore I continue to hear from local EMS workers regarding a shortage of ambulances, sustaining staff, underutilized resources, fatigue, and flexibility to address community need. I hear your concerns, and though AHS has increased the number of paramedic positions by 9 per cent since 2019, we need to address systemic issues. These are life-and-death decisions. I understand and can relate to the stress and the anxiety of waiting for an ambulance, and I share that with you. I have listened to your personal stories, and I've been honoured to hear them, and I'm honoured to bring your concerns before the Legislature.

Although there are initiatives to lift the cap on overtime and the use of alternative destinations, which are helping to increase capacity, we made a promise to maintain a level of service, and we must honour that promise. This requires immediate and continued consultation with our municipalities to see improvements and to develop a strong plan. Mobile integrated health teams are helping to reduce the need for transportation altogether by providing in-house care and support. We are all impacted when EMS response times increase. The well-being of our rural communities, their growth and economy are dependent on strong services, and the safety and health of all our citizens must be a priority.

EMS is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, every day of the year across Alberta. Over 550,000 events occur each year, involving more than 500 ambulances, with 5,500 EMS practitioners providing care. Mr. Speaker, regardless of the number of calls, Albertans need to have the confidence that EMS will always respond.

Through you, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the workers for their dedication and support each and every day as they care for Albertans and assist them through some of the most challenging moments of their lives. I also want to thank my municipalities for their work, consultation, and wisdom as to how we can improve the system.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

COVID-19 Response and Vaccination of Children

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the chief medical officer spoke the words none of us want to hear, fifth wave. Quote: we've seen before how fast things can change, and we must stay vigilant. However, this government, as we've discussed here, have an alarming pattern of ignoring the evidence until it's too late. But right now there is actually time to make changes in how they will be prepared in case we see another wave. Can the Premier tell us what,

if any, lessons he learned from the fourth wave, and are there any things that he will do differently should cases begin to rise again?

Mr. Kenney: I appreciate the thoughtful question, Mr. Speaker, from the hon. Leader of the Opposition. The answer is yes. Alberta Health Services, first of all, has contracted Ernst & Young to work on a strategy to enhance capacity, particularly with respect to intensive care, to create greater fungibility between the surgical services and ICUs.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, the COVID cabinet committee is reviewing advice from the minister on what triggers to follow should we – God forbid – need any enhanced measures. But right now, thankfully, the fourth wave appears to be under control.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, this government's failures of the fourth wave were evidenced in September's back-to-school plan. They fired 1,400 contact tracers and then watched as the system went under huge pressure as more than 700 schools reported outbreaks or alerts. We can't repeat that mistake either, and we don't have time to wait for Ernst & Young to tell us that. It should be obvious. Can the Premier tell us when AHS will take over contact tracing in schools and how many tracers have been hired?

Mr. Kenney: Monday the 22nd, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to hearing how many contact tracers have actually been hired for that job.

Right now kids between 12 and 18 only have a two-dose vaccination rate of a little over 75 per cent. Meanwhile parents are desperately waiting for the approval of vaccines for kids under 12. Now, I understand Alberta is working on a plan for this approval. However, what can the Premier tell us about when we can expect to see his plan, and, more to the point, is he planning for in-school vaccination clinics for children under 12 years so that we can get those rates up?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, with respect to the number of contact tracers, as of October 5 AHS had approximately 1,154 investigators and contact tracers in addition to 247 casual staff, so there are more than adequate resources, particularly given the significant decline in new daily cases.

With respect to pediatric vaccines, we await the decision of Health Canada. I do hope, Mr. Speaker – and I think it's good that they've indicated they're going to do a full review, not an accelerated review. Parents need to be sure, given the low chances of severe outcomes for younger children, that the vaccine is very safe and effective. We will of course be there to provide it to any parents who want it for their children.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Ms Notley: Well, unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, the number of contact tracers identified by the Premier is about half of where we were, and that number is what led to the collapse in contact tracing.

COVID-19 Response and Vaccination Rates

Ms Notley: Now, meanwhile small businesses are tired of this government waiting until cases hit a crisis point, slapping on new restrictions, promising support, and then making them wait for months. The Edmonton Chamber of Commerce asked a long time ago for a business risk index so that business owners would be

better prepared for actions. Even 18 months late, this could still be a very helpful idea. Will the Premier consider implementing it?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, Alberta has provided upwards of \$700 million of direct financial support to businesses hit by COVID public health measures. We rolled out an additional \$2,000 for those businesses that are complying with the restriction exemption program to help them address associated costs. We continue to speak constantly to business organizations and individual business owners about their ongoing needs. I can inform the House that in the past few weeks I've spoken to nearly 20 industry and business organizations about precisely these issues.

Ms Notley: Well, if by "rolled out" the Premier means told them to wait several months and into the future, then, yes, that's what's happened to the vaccine passport supports.

Meanwhile we know they work, as do vaccines themselves. We also know that community outreach works. Trusted leaders going door to door is what brought rates up in northeast Calgary to 99 per cent. By the way, congratulations to everybody, including the people across the way, for that great achievement. However, in Taber the rate is 59 per cent. In the county of Forty Mile the rate is 53 per cent. In High Level it's 34 per cent. Is it an idea that the Premier will consider to take the plan that was so successful in Calgary and put it into other communities?

Mr. Kenney: In fact, yes, and I appreciate the constructive comment, Mr. Speaker. I think the progress that upper northeast Calgary made, going from the least vaccinated urban LGA to the most vaccinated area in the province, is an amazing expression of the Alberta spirit. I'd like to give a shout-out to the Minister of Transportation for helping to lead that process. We're working, actually, with the community tables there, that we help to fund and facilitate, to see how we can roll out some of the lessons learned to undervaccinated parts of the province, many of which are in rural communities. We are engaging with local leadership and have been all along, and there's some good news there, actually. In the last couple of months we've seen significant increases in vaccination rates in many of those rural areas.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, that proposal was made months ago, and we're still not seeing the targeted programs in those vulnerable communities.

Now, meanwhile Albertans need to know that the government will actually act when it matters most because, as we know, no one really trusts these folks over there. Every time cases go up, the entire cabinet becomes a flight risk, quite literally. To the Premier: Albertans don't trust you folks anymore, so, once again, will you agree to follow Ontario's lead, get out of the way, and assemble an independent science advisory table to handle the pandemic should we see cases start to rise again? Albertans . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, we do listen, with the greatest of respect, and take onboard in all COVID policy decisions the advice of the chief medical officer of health, who, in turn, calls upon the advice of her regional medical officers and her entire team of experts, who base their analysis and recommendations on all of the data we have in Alberta, across Canada, and around the world. We think that's the appropriate way for the COVID cabinet committee to receive scientific input.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Ms Notley: Apparently, the answer is no.

Emergency Shelters and Affordable Housing

Ms Notley: Nonetheless, Mr. Speaker, new topic. For months shelter operators in Edmonton have been raising the alarm on space. They didn't have the funds. Winter was coming. Today we learned capacity is at 97 per cent, and the city needs an extra 427 beds just to meet demand. These Albertans are the ones most at risk of illness, injury, or death when the temperature drops, which, by the way, it already has. To the Premier. You were warned months ago, and instead of acting, you waited until today, after the snow hit the ground and the situation was critical. This is a self-created crisis. Why did you wait till its absolute height before you acted?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. I think that on the second day in March after the declaration of a public health emergency, March 2020, the COVID cabinet committee immediately authorized \$50 million in emergency support for homeless and women's shelters. We increased that by a further \$21 million. The now Minister of Transportation was intensely focused on working with the homeless-serving agencies to ensure they had adequate support, and indeed I'm proud today to have announced an additional \$21 million plus 1 and a half million dollars to build spaces at Commonwealth Stadium.

Ms Notley: Where is this government's actual record? They cut affordable housing investment by 80 per cent and are now working on plans to privatize or sell the rest. They cut rental assistance by \$44 million, and his changes to the BFE program robbed the housing allowance of over 3,000 vulnerable Albertans. Their already meagre income has dropped from \$1,100 a month to \$900. This Premier doesn't get to claim victory when his approach is to put more Albertans on the streets. On what planet is trading homes for floor mats worthy of celebration?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, that is all untrue. You know, today I was at the Hope Mission, Herb Jamieson Centre, a new emergency shelter. It's opened up 400 high-quality emergency shelter beds. Do you know what? That was only built thanks to a multimillion-dollar contribution from this government because the NDP government refused to fund that project. Today the mayor of Edmonton praised this government for having acted overnight to respond to his call to work with the city on additional emergency beds, just as we continue to invest \$80 million in long-term affordable housing.

2:00

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, there is an emergency shelter crisis because this government cut almost a billion dollars out of our affordable housing plan. There is an emergency shelter crisis because this government took \$300 out of an \$1,100-a-month income from the most vulnerable, mentally challenged, addiction-challenged Albertans. That's why we have a shelter crisis. It was absolutely created by this government. They should take responsibility and apologize and change course. Albertans deserve it.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, that is completely nonsense. The fact of the matter is that we are making enormous investments in long-term affordable housing, \$80 million alone for Edmonton to create, I believe, 340 additional long-term affordable housing units in this city. But it's true that all around the world there has been a growth in urban homeless populations through the COVID era for a number of reasons, including people coming here to access more services but also the challenges in terms of spacing and public health orders.

Ms Notley: You created the homelessness crisis.

Mr. Kenney: We're responding, and Mayor Sohi made that very clear today.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

United Conservative Party

Mr. Dang: There have been serious allegations made against the office of the Premier, an office that directly oversees government operations and government policy such as changes to election law. A member of the UCP caucus, the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane, alleges that the Premier's office colluded with political action committees to pay delegate fees and provide, quote, other favours in advance of the UCP AGM this weekend. My question to the Premier is simple. Did the Premier or any member of his taxpayer-paid staff ever engage with political action committees to pay fees or provide favours to support the Premier at his convention? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member knows full well that that's party business and not appropriate for this Chamber. Having said that, the party has released a statement today making it very, very clear that that is utterly, one hundred per cent false. What I can tell you is that I'm excited to be part of a grassroots party, the United Conservative Party, who will meet this weekend and make decisions about the future of our party, about policies that we should bring to this Chamber. Again, we'll gather to celebrate that our province is on track to have the largest economic recovery inside the country.

Mr. Dang: They're ducking and dodging, but the Premier's office is being seriously accused, and that throws into question every single action and policy that this government makes. This isn't the first time that the Premier has been at the centre of controversy. In the past few weeks the RCMP have made it clear that they continue investigations into electoral fraud in the UCP leadership race in 2017, a race that this Premier won. This Premier is the least trusted in the country, and that was before allegations came that he's rigging his party's AGM and using the resources of the Premier's office to do it. Does the Premier really expect Albertans to believe that he's innocent of these allegations when they're coming from inside his caucus?

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. I might just remind that the Member for Edmonton-South needs to direct his comments through the chair, and making a statement like, "Is he rigging?" would certainly be unparliamentary.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, I hear that the NDP would be confused with this because, again, they have a party that spends their time rigging everything associated with their process, from nominations to conventions. Our party has a rigorous process in determining motions that should be debated on the floor. It goes on with all of our 87 independent constituency associations, who have picked the important policies that will be debated this weekend. I look forward to hearing that debate and hearing their advice when it comes to those important policies. At the end of the day that's just the hon. member and his party again trying to distract from the economic recovery in this province, \$7.4 billion last week alone.

Mr. Dang: It appears that the rot within the government runs deep, and it's deeply concerning for all of us who actually care about democracy. The government caucus has been investigated for bribery, forgery, and fraud. The Member for Calgary-Falconridge was fined \$30,000 for breaking election law. The UCP even used their majority in this place to fire the very Election Commissioner investigating complaints against the Premier. Today I have written to the Elections Alberta CEO demanding an investigation into the allegations made by the UCP Member for Airdrie-Cochrane. Will the Premier stand up today and commit to fully complying with him and his staff to this investigation?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is trying to distract from what is the real news of the month. I did misspeak. It was only \$7 billion last week, but I expect that you'll continue to see more because of the strong policies of this government that are attracting investment, putting Albertans back to work. That is the sole focus of this government, will continue to be the sole focus of this caucus and our party. I would expect that you'll continue to see the NDP do everything they can to distract because – you know why? – they've always been focused on betting against Albertans. We're betting on Alberta, and we're going to have the best economic recovery we've ever seen. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika. [interjection] Order. Order. The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika is the one with the call.

Irrigation Infrastructure

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Twenty twenty-one has been a uniquely challenging year for farmers in Alberta and across western Canada. In addition to the challenges brought by COVID-19, dry conditions and extreme heat had a severe impact on our agricultural producers. Alberta's government stepped up to support them with \$340 million in ag recovery programs and committed to continuing to support our producers. Given that irrigation is vital to the success of our agriculture sector, what is the government doing in Alberta to improve the expansion of irrigation infrastructure? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. the minister of agriculture and forestry has the call.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's government recognizes the important role that irrigation will play in both our province's economic recovery plan and in helping our farmers and ranchers recover from the dry conditions they faced last summer. That's why we partnered with the Canada Infrastructure Bank and 10 irrigation districts to invest an additional \$117.7 million to modernize irrigation infrastructure. This builds on the \$815 million announced last fall, for a total of nearly \$933 million, the largest investment in irrigation in the history of Alberta.

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

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that agriculture is the lifeblood of rural Alberta and given that Alberta's agriculture producers have been struggling to cope with drought conditions – you can imagine their relief when they learned of our government's historic \$933 million combined investment in Alberta irrigation systems and infrastructure – to the minister: what types of projects will be included in the current government's historic investment in

irrigation, and how will these projects strengthen our industry for generations to come?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of agriculture and forestry.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's irrigation infrastructure hasn't received any significant investment since the '50s. Unlike previous governments, we're taking the action now to invest the total \$933 million in converting canals to pipelines, rehabilitating existing pipelines, and modernizing Alberta's aging irrigation infrastructure. This means increasing primary crop production, improving water storage capacity, providing flood protection, and supporting long-term, value-added processing activity.

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

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for the answer. Given that our agriculture industry will be crucial to our economic recovery and given that Alberta's economic recovery plan is well under way and that we're seeing investment and job growth in a wide variety of economic sectors and given that Alberta's irrigation industry already creates about 56,000 jobs and generates about \$3.6 billion in annual GDP, what can we expect the overall economic impact to be from this historic, nearly \$1 billion combined investment, particularly for jobs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of agriculture and forestry.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Agriculture is a crucial contributor to Alberta's economy, and our \$933 million investment has the potential to create up to 8,700 good-paying jobs while expanding irrigable land by up to 230,000 acres. Irrigated land in Alberta currently represents less than 5 per cent of cultivated land while contributing about 20 per cent of agricultural GDP. This has the potential to contribute up to \$477 million every year to Alberta's GDP. We're creating jobs today and creating more economic opportunities for the future.

Restrictions Exemption Program Implementation Grant

Mr. Bilous: Yesterday the UCP government announced that they're opening up applications for a \$2,000 grant for small and medium-sized businesses to help them implement the UCP's vaccine passport system. While this funding is welcome, it comes two months after the vaccine passport was implemented, and it's only applications that have opened. There's no guarantee of when the funding will actually be in the hands of these businesses. Why did it take this government two months just to open up applications, and is this what they call moving at the speed of business?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board has risen.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Firstly, I want to acknowledge the challenges that Alberta small businesses have had during this unprecedented time through the pandemic as well as the energy price crash. That's why this government has been there to support them. We supported them with an over \$700 million investment through the small-business recovery program. We've recently announced and, in fact, implemented the \$2,000 support for restaurants and businesses following the REP program. I can say that we will process those applications expeditiously. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Bilous: We'll hold you to that.

Given that we've been hearing from the business community that financial support has been taking too long to be distributed throughout the pandemic and given that we're still – still – hearing from businesses waiting for grant funding promised to them back in the spring, which is completely unbelievable, and given that the UCP's first wave report highlighted their failure to get support to small businesses, how can this government continue to make the same mistakes over and over again while these businesses remain desperate for support?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The reality is that the vast majority of claims were processed very quickly, in many cases just within days. There are a few claims that remain outstanding. We've heard from the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation that their team is working with businesses that are needing to provide more information. I can say to the member opposite that they're working expeditiously. Again, this province supported small businesses at a greater level than any province across the country. We'll continue to be there.

Mr. Bilous: So this government is okay with a quarter of the businesses falling through the cracks?

Given that the UCP's vaccine passport system came into force in mid-September and given that the city of Calgary started consulting on the program to help businesses implement the vaccine passport and managed to roll out a similar funding program in mid-October, a full month ahead of the province, despite the province having the advantage of knowing when the passport was coming, how is it that other levels of government were able to move faster and provide support ahead of the province? Is it because the UCP was too busy celebrating their best summer ever to help businesses experiencing their worst summer ever?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, this government has supported small businesses through the pandemic at unprecedented levels, levels higher than any other province. I find it very rich coming from the member opposite who was part of a government that drove billions of dollars of investment out of this province, where many small businesses lost opportunities, where jobs were lost. We will not take advice from the members opposite.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* is next.

Municipal Funding

Member Ceci: Thank you. Municipal elections are over, and today mayors, councillors, and reeves will be gathering at the annual Alberta Urban Municipalities Association convention. They'll be discussing all of the cuts and downloading done by this UCP government: giant cuts to MSI, slashing GIPOT, and making municipalities pay for policing while this government doesn't actually deliver any new boots on the ground. It's a recipe for chaos, not partnerships. Will the Premier or the minister be explaining this week to those gathered at AUMA why they have broken their partnership with municipalities and forced costs, heavy costs, to be downloaded onto Alberta communities?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the Minister of Municipal Affairs is at AUMA right now speaking with . . .

Ms Hoffman: You can't say that.

Ms Schulz: Oh, sorry. You're right. I'm not allowed to say that. I take that back, Mr. Speaker, and apologize.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs is dedicated to hearing from municipal leaders right across this province. We know that this has been a very difficult couple of years as we've made it through the COVID-19 pandemic. I do want to talk about a number of the ways that our government has supported the province's municipalities to respond to the pandemic, Mr. Speaker. The provincial response planning team co-ordinated the non health-related response to COVID-19. The department was responsible for supporting and procuring . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

Member Ceci: Given that extreme weather events, like those we are seeing in B.C., mean that we need to make our infrastructure even more resilient and given that it's impossible for municipalities to adapt their infrastructure as their purported provincial partner cuts their funding and given that instead of leadership from this government all we're seeing is an agenda of cuts as the province abandons its responsibilities and leaves municipalities to fend for themselves, to the Minister of Municipal Affairs or others: why is there no plan to adapt municipal infrastructure for extreme weather events? Are you really going to continue to bury your head in the sand and leave municipalities to fend for themselves?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The government is committed to making substantial financial commitments to municipalities by providing them an average of \$722 million from 2021 to 2023 through the municipal sustainability initiative to build infrastructure. In '24-25 the local government fiscal framework will replace the municipal sustainability initiative, with municipalities receiving \$722 million per year. Funding in future years will rise and fall based on half the percentage change in provincial revenues, ensuring municipalities share in provincial revenue changes. The new framework will ensure predictability for municipalities.

Member Ceci: Given that this government's agenda of devastating cuts means that municipalities have to choose to stop building infrastructure or creating jobs or start cutting basic public services or start raising taxes on ratepayers and given that household budgets are already being hammered as a direct result of the UCP policies – car insurance hikes: their fault; surging electricity bills: their fault; property tax spikes: their fault – Minister, tell Albertans why this government has hammered household budgets to cover the cost of their failed economic policies: KXL, the failed corporate handout, the war room . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I need to correct the record. Over the last two fiscal years we've added over \$700 million of additional capital funding – additional capital funding – to municipalities so they can ensure that they can prepare and build infrastructure necessary for economic recovery, and today we're seeing that economic recovery.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie has the next question.

Economic Recovery and Job Creation

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that October's job numbers are in and they paint a positive picture for our province's economic recovery, with 9,000 new full-time jobs being created just last month and the unemployment rate now lower than at any other time during the pandemic, to the Premier or the minister: can you tell us which industries are driving these positive job numbers?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier has risen.

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you for the member's question. The great thing is this. While we're seeing a recovery in commodity prices, we are seeing industries across the province and new industries – the hydrogen industry is a new industry which is emerging. I know the NDP will hate to hear this. We've had three or four major hydrogen announcements, and there are a whole bunch more of a much greater scale that this government is working on day and night to land petrochemical projects of a massive scale. Of course, film and television is having its best year ever. Forestry is having its best year ever. Tech and ven cap are having its best year ever. This economy is taking off like a rocket.

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

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Premier. Given that in the last 20 months we have experienced the most severe public health crisis since the Spanish flu, the most severe global economic retraction since the Great Depression, and the most severe energy crisis in the history of Alberta, yet despite all this Alberta has shown its culture of resilience, with positive trends like new investment returning to the province and job numbers rising, to the Premier: what are your thoughts on these positive trends, and do you expect that they will continue in the coming months?

Mr. Kenney: Well, we do, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the NDP is laughing. They're laughing at the fact that 65,000 net new jobs have been created in the last three or four months. That's 65,000 families that can put food on the table. And we're only just starting. The Conference Board, TD Bank, Desjardins, the National Bank, the Royal Bank all project that Alberta will lead the country in economic growth in 2022. Most of the announcements, the big announcements that have been made in the past six months, won't even start to go into the ground until next year. You know what we're going to have as the biggest problem next year: will we have enough people? But that's why we have the Labour Mobility Act, the Alberta advantage immigration strategy . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member has the call.

Mr. Milliken: Hear, hear. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Premier. With the Alberta jobs now program being an important part of our economic recovery and with the second intake of this program now open as well as some new changes to the program being announced, to the Premier or the minister: can you outline how this program and the new changes will help continue to create new jobs and positive economic growth?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. An important question. As I said, we believe the biggest economic challenge we'll be facing

next year will likely be skill and labour shortages for perhaps years to come. That's why the jobs now program is part of the workforce strategy. Through it we've helped to support the creation of 14,000 jobs. I've met a number of small businesses in my constituency, hair salons and restaurants, that have been able to onboard new young staff and get the training support they need. I want to commend the Minister of Labour and Immigration for expanding the criteria for the program. We hope to support the creation of an additional 25,000 new jobs through this, the largest training program in Alberta government history.

2:20 British Columbia Floods and Mudslides

Mr. Dach: Mr. Speaker, our hearts continue to go out to the people of British Columbia as they deal with the record flood and mudslides that have taken a life, destroyed thousands of homes, and damaged vital infrastructure, and I hope that this government here in Alberta will be there to support the people of B.C. as British Columbians have supported us in the past. The city of Calgary has proposed sharing assistance through the Calgary Emergency Management Agency. Can the Minister of Municipal Affairs inform this House exactly what preparation has been done to be ready the second B.C. asks for our assistance? Be specific, please.

Mr. Kenney: I thank the member for the question. I know that we, all Albertans, are deeply concerned for our friends, neighbours, and relatives in British Columbia facing the flooding and damage, both public and private. Mr. Speaker, I've spoken to Premier Horgan both on Monday and Tuesday. The Municipal Affairs minister reached out to his counterpart. I'll be speaking to Premier Horgan shortly after question period to see what assistance they need. There have been no requests forthcoming, but we'll be there to provide any practical support that we possibly can.

Mr. Dach: That's as it should be.

Now, given that during this pandemic our supply lines were already stretched thin and Alberta businesses were feeling the impact in terms of shortages and higher prices for everything from chicken wings to safety equipment to coffee filters – and that was all before the massive B.C. floods – and given that this government has failed to provide solutions in the past to these critical supply issues and they've also failed to support small businesses during every stage of this pandemic, including rural bus lines, what specifically is the minister of jobs doing to support small businesses already stressed by supply-line disruptions and can't endure anymore?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, apart from the completely inaccurate characterization of, in fact, over \$700 million in direct cash support to businesses – only the NDP would call that nothing – he's right to be concerned about the impact on already hard-hit supply chains. This is exactly the point I raised with the Prime Minister and the forum of first ministers yesterday because we're going to have to see redirection of transport from the port of Vancouver imports through the states of Washington, Montana, and then north. I've asked the federal government to relax COVID border measures to facilitate that trucking and that train traffic.

Mr. Dach: Given that grocery prices have already shot up in recent weeks and given that analysts anticipate a steep rise in the cost of natural gas in the months ahead and given that household budgets in Alberta have already been hammered by skyrocketing insurance costs and electricity bills, both of which come as a direct result of horrid UCP policies, and given that the B.C. floods now threaten to increase costs for families even further, will someone on that side

of the House stand up and offer families some measure of relief? Cap insurance rates. Cap electricity rates. Do something real to help Alberta families. They're barely making ends meet.

Mr. Kenney: Imagine the NDP feigning concern about the cost of living after having imposed the carbon tax on Albertans, that pushed up the cost of everything: of home heating, of buying groceries, of driving to work, of living normal lives. This government kept its commitment to reduce the cost of living, Mr. Speaker, through Bill 1, An Act to Repeal the Carbon Tax. Unfortunately, the federal Liberals have insisted on imposing that cost hike on Albertans. We know where this government stands, on the side of ordinary working families and against carbon taxes that raise the cost of their lives.

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

Agricultural Concerns

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My heartfelt thoughts go out to all British Columbians affected by the flood. I'm especially concerned for farmers there. There have been many photos shared online of stranded animals and reports of dairy farmers needing to throw out milk and other products because they can't move or store them. These conditions are impacting farmers across the country. Alberta agriculture is a heavy commodity market that relies on exports. Farmers are incurring unexpected costs after already battling through a tough season. What is the minister of agriculture doing to support Alberta farmers in light of these floods?

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Just today, after taking some sound advice from the Premier, our office reached out to British Columbia. Right now they had a major flood in their provincial veterinary facility. We've reached out to see if there's anything we can do to help in that regard, and obviously we'll continue to monitor the supply chain. All of our products go through B.C., so we'll watch it closely.

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

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the rain and floods in B.C. have taken out access through highways and trains, so Alberta farmers will struggle to be able to get product to market, and given that this could lead to crops needing to stay in the bins longer and farmers needing to find different transportation routes with additional costs and given this could in turn raise cost on seed and feed and other products and the price of food in general, it is clear we need a strong plan to address this problem. Will the minister of agriculture commit here and now to financial assistance for Alberta farmers to address the increased transportation cost as a result of the flood?

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to that member's advocacy. I've never heard so often until lately the amount of dollars they'd like to get into the sector that we all care about so much, but I would say this is going to be an epic year through the agri-insurance programs that have been offered through the province and the federal government to go to our agriculture industry. This has been a tough and terrible year. As far as our commodities, we've seen a lot of storage built in this province right

on our rail lines, that will hold those grains until the lines are fixed and the roads are fixed.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given there were many supply chain disruptions during the pandemic, which has highlighted the need for a more diversified economy in Alberta, and given that Alberta agriculture relies heavily on exporting commodities – however, there is a great potential in value-added agriculture – and given that the governments of Manitoba and Saskatchewan have prioritized leading on attracting more value-added agriculture than Alberta has and they're seeing more investment because of it, what is the minister willing to do immediately to support the development of more value-added agriculture opportunities in Alberta so agriculture is less volatile to our supply chain markets?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member. I don't know if she heard earlier, but we just announced up to 230,000 acres of new irrigation in southern Alberta, and nothing is going to drive the agrifood industry in the same way. To give some credit to the ministry and the minister that sat before me, over \$883 million has been invested in the agrifood sector. We've already surpassed our goal of 2,100 jobs in that sector, and we're only halfway there.

Physician Services in Fort McMurray

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, Fort McMurray has always struggled to attract physicians and other health professionals, being a community that is north and remote. Despite the natural beauty of the region, a vibrant community, and exceptional people, constituents from Fort McMurray proper have to travel nearly 46,000 times outside the community for health care needs every year. That is more than half of Fort McMurray's population. These constituents have to drive a 900-kilometre round trip braving the dangerous highways and winter conditions just to get treatment. What is this government doing to support rural northern communities in regards to health?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question and representing his constituents. Let me be clear. Alberta's government is committed to ensuring every Albertan has access to a doctor everywhere in this province. We are spending \$90 million this year to recruit and retain rural doctors. Physician resource planners at AHS are actively recruiting doctors from both home in Canada and around the world. They work closely with community partners and organizations such as local physician recruitment and retention committees, health advisory councils, and the Rural Health Professions Action Plan.

Mr. Yao: It is given that despite the billions of dollars that come from this region's industries to the federal and provincial coffers, we struggle with access to health. According to the most recent community health profile for Fort McMurray, we have .7 family doctors per thousand people, compared to the provincial average of 1.2. That's almost half. We also have a birth rate of 36.4 per thousand, compared to the province's 26. Pediatricians, obstetricians, and other professionals are needed to help children, mothers, and families. Does this government have plans to address these shortages?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The supply of physicians and specialists in smaller communities is a long-standing challenge, and COVID-19 has not helped. We know we need to improve the number of specialists available in Fort McMurray and elsewhere across the province. That's why we removed the cap on the rural and remote northern program, exempted rural physicians from hospital fee policy changes, and invested over \$6 million over the next three years to help students pay for medical school in exchange for practising in a rural community after graduation. We will continue to work with our partners in AHS, the AMA, and other stakeholders so rural communities have better access to health care.

2:30

Mr. Yao: In June of this year the Ministry of Health announced support to reinstate the residency program in Fort McMurray. It is given that this program would help attract doctors to Fort McMurray and encourage much-needed specialists to set roots in the north. I've heard nothing of this program since it was announced that it was to be implemented. To the same minister. Your predecessor committed to this program, but I've seen no action so far. If this program has been scrapped, tell us why.

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to assure the hon. member this program has not been scrapped. We have established a committee to guide the process in Fort McMurray, to engage with community and stakeholders, and to provide regular updates on their progress. When operational, this residency program will be the fourth such program currently being operated by the University of Alberta, joining sites in Grande Prairie, Red Deer, and Yellowknife. Positive learning experiences in rural health care settings lead to more physicians choosing rural practice. We know that this program will help attract and retain doctors in Fort McMurray. I want to thank the hon. member for his advocacy and look forward to his input as we work with the committee.

Wetaskiwin Homeless Encampment and Affordable Housing

Ms Renaud: Last week I went to the Minister of Indigenous Relations' constituency for the second time and met with people experiencing homelessness. The people there live in raggedy tents covered with tarps in a windblown field, which is hidden from view behind Walmart. There are no supports, no washrooms, no wraparound services, no running water, no regular supply of food. People are completely left to make it on their own. Wetaskiwin has been asking the UCP government for support for months, but the province did nothing. Nearly three-quarters of the people living in this encampment are Indigenous. Why did the Minister of Indigenous Relations let this happen in his own constituency to his own constituents?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My heart goes out to the people. I visit them weekly. We go out, we take supplies out to them. I know most of the people out there, just people that have hit upon hard times. We're doing all we can for them. The funding is in place. We've got funding there for them. Due to the past election, of course, it turned into a bit of an election issue there, but we are moving forward. We are helping the people. Just this last week the chief actually came out from one of the bands and offered to take all the people to his community, but they refused. It's something that we just have to deal with.

Ms Renaud: Given that this encampment has been described as worse than a refugee camp where human beings staying there don't have access to the most basic items for survival even in fair weather and given that this human disaster has been common knowledge and has been growing for months, it's astounding to me that this UCP minister said that he didn't know where the city of Wetaskiwin went off track on the issue and took zero responsibility. This evolving, disgraceful human disaster has been allowed to unfold for months. How can the minister be oblivious to this and wait until the temperatures plummet before the government acts? That's unacceptable.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, what an outrageous question from an Official Opposition who we've heard over and over about from Indigenous communities who confirmed that they did nothing. The NDP did nothing for Indigenous communities. That Indigenous affairs minister, the best in Alberta history, goes out each and every day and fights for communities all across the province, in particular the communities in his own neighbourhood. I have the privilege of representing Wetaskiwin county with the minister. Let me say that they are well represented in this Chamber with a minister who is dedicated to real solutions and fights each and every day for his community. That member should take note.

Ms Renaud: Given that this government has systematically cut benefits for Albertans who live in poverty, who are disabled, pushing more people onto the streets – they literally cut accommodation shelter benefits, \$300 – how can people live on the core; that is, income support? The numbers are growing because this government has made decisions that have caused this problem. Answer the question. What are you going to do?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted.

The hon. Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Luan: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to once again answer the House that the policy for shelter allowance has been there since 2006. There's no change in the policy. You can see the opposition keeps spinning facts, spinning after spinning even on a great day. Today we announced \$21 million to enhance shelter service in our province, to give more support services to the most vulnerable. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. minister has the call.

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With \$21.5 million we're giving more resources to the most vulnerable in our province, including the ones that the opposition mentioned in Wetaskiwin. We are taking this . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West has a question.

Medical Laboratory Services in Lethbridge

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, this week a constituent of mine tried to book a routine blood test at her local lab in Lethbridge. She was dismayed to discover that the hospital lab's first available appointment was in two weeks. The shortest wait was in 10 days. We've had two labs close in Lethbridge, and the lab in Magrath is also currently closed. You could drive to Pincher Creek or Fort Macleod. If you can do that, you can get your lab work done within a couple of days but not in Lethbridge. What is the minister's plan

to ensure the people of Lethbridge have access to this basic primary care service?

Mr. Copping: I thank the hon. member for the question. Mr. Speaker, as indicated in this House before, provision of services to all parts of the province is extremely important for this government and is one of my key mandates in terms of increasing capacity, which includes not only capacity to surgeries but includes capacity to diagnostic services. I invite the hon. member to provide any details concerning this, and I'd be happy to look into the details of the situation.

Ms Phillips: The details are that it's been all over the media, Mr. Speaker.

Now, given that access to laboratory services is predicated on those results being sent to someone, a family physician, and given that there are about a third of people in Lethbridge without a family physician and given that without a GP many folks have been turned away from the lab, having a standing order for blood work despite that, can the minister explain to the people of Lethbridge what his plan is for folks who can't get routine lab work done in a reasonable time frame? Even if they could, there's no one to send it to.

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned to the hon. member, I think earlier this week, and I had received also representations from my colleague who also represents Lethbridge, we are working very hard with the Lethbridge Chamber of Commerce, the city of Lethbridge, Economic Development Lethbridge, and with the Chinook PC and medical director and executive director in providing not only fast-tracking in terms of physician resources, doing recruitment and retention, but also in regard to authorizing a new nurse practitioner to be able to provide services, doctor services. Again, on the other issue in terms of blood services, happy to speak to the member.

Ms Phillips: Given that the question is about what happens with lab services, given that two have closed and we have the one in Magrath now temporarily closed as well, and given that here we are, yet again, another day, another health care crisis in Lethbridge authored by the UCP war on health workers, given that a two-plus weeks' wait for routine lab tests is unacceptable, will the minister deliver a plan to stop the collapse of the health care system in Lethbridge by the end of 2021, and if not, why not?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, as I already indicated, you know, our government is focused on providing services and health care services to all Albertans across the province and ensuring that they're equitable. In regard to the lab services, there again I invite the hon. member to provide the details to my office, and we'll take a look at it so we have a plan forward. We fully appreciate that we need to provide health care services equitably across the province, and we will deliver on that.

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

Federal-provincial Child Care Agreement

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this week I joined Albertans across this province in celebrating a historic made-in-Alberta child care agreement our government struck with Ottawa. The agreement will not only make child care more affordable in our province, but it will protect Alberta's diverse child care system. I know the minister was unflinching in her support for private child care operators, who represent the majority of Alberta's child care spaces. To the Minister of Children's Services: why was

it so important to protect private child care operators and choice in our child care system?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This was something that was incredibly important to us because we respect the choices that Alberta parents and families make, especially when it comes to the type of child care that they choose. Close to 70 per cent of child care spaces right across this province are, in fact, operated by private operators. What we learned from the NDP's pilot is that we didn't want to create a situation where we as government were picking and choosing winners and losers when it came to centres and when it came to which parents we were going to support. We wanted to make sure that working parents right across this province in the space that they choose, whether that be day homes, preschools, or child care facilities, had access to these supports.

2:40

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for her answer. Given that we know that the NDP have an ideological axe to grind with private child care operators in this province and given that the NDP tried implementing a universal pilot program that completely excluded private providers and given that the opposition's mock proposal to Ottawa would again have left private providers in the dark, to the same minister: why did the NDP keep saying that our plan was similar to their plan when they weren't willing to defend or support Alberta's private providers?

Thank you.

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's actually a great question, and it's a tough one to answer because the NDP plan – you know, they put forward a couple of plans, I think, that had absolutely no details and absolutely no costing. In fact, what private operators told us is that not only were they left out in the pilot; they believed they were going to be left out in this program. That wouldn't surprise me because one province over we saw just yesterday that FOIP documents show that the B.C. NDP chose to wind down private operations altogether. I have a feeling that's how the members opposite would fund their plan, and that's not something we were interested in doing. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the minister for that answer. Given that it is good to know our government is supporting private child care operators and given that almost 70 per cent of child care spaces in our province are run by women business owners and given that the NDP was not once but twice willing to put private child care operators out of business in our province, in my community, again to the minister: what are you hearing from stakeholders, particularly private child care providers, now that this historic agreement has been signed?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It was important to us to respect and reflect the choices that Alberta parents make right across this province every single day, and I'm happy to share some of the feedback that we have received from operators right

across this province. To quote Anita Turna – now, she’s the executive director of the Alberta Association of Child Care Operators and a private operator, who says: “I’ve worked in child care for over 10 years, and I know first-hand how impactful this investment will be for kids and families across Alberta. As a private . . . provider, I . . . know that parents make child care choices for a variety of reasons.” Nonprofit providers are supportive of our plan as well.

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

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 86 Electricity Statutes Amendment Act, 2021

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 86, the Electricity Statutes Amendment Act, 2021.

As we are all aware in this House, we are on the cusp of one of the greatest economic recoveries that our province has ever seen. We’re going to need an electricity system that can power that recovery. These amendments will create just that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 86 read a first time]

The Speaker: At 2:02 a point of order was called by the Deputy Government House Leader.

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on a point of order on 23(h), (i), and (j). While the hon. Premier was answering a question posed to him by the hon. Leader of Her Majesty’s Loyal Opposition, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona said: you created a homeless crisis. Now, Mr. Speaker, I understand that you may not have heard this remark, but it is paramount that this point of order be brought to the attention of the House. I also know that the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, sitting right next to that member at the time, clearly heard it, because if I heard it through a mask and across this aisle, I know that member heard it as well.

I would like someone in this House to rise, apologize, and retract that remark. Such a remark is abhorrent, to suggest that the hon. Premier created a homeless crisis.

Mr. Speaker, it is incumbent upon us as a government to do whatever we can to support those who are facing homelessness right now, and we are doing just that. But to suggest that we created the crisis is ridiculous. Frankly, I would like someone on that side of the House to show some class, stand up, and apologize on behalf of the Leader of the Opposition.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given that the debate was around the homelessness crisis, given the government’s actions of cutting affordable housing investment by 80 per cent, cutting rental assistance by \$44 million, removing over 3,000 Albertans from having accommodations and shelter benefits, I certainly think it would be a matter of debate that the UCP created this homelessness crisis and not a point of order. But I do not have

the benefit of the Blues, and I did not hear the remarks as it was quite raucous in the House at the time. I believe it is a matter of debate. The UCP’s actions have contributed to the homelessness crisis.

I look forward to your ruling.

Mr. Schow: That’s ridiculous.

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. You’ve had your opportunity to debate the point of order. I can assure you that your case on the point of order is weakened by your consistent desire to interject following the argument.

I would make some additional commentary here. I would agree that if the Leader of the Opposition had made comments on or off the record that were, in fact, “You created the homelessness crisis,” that would be unparliamentary, and “The UCP created the homelessness crisis” may in fact be a matter of debate, but the chair is reluctant to rule on comments that are made off the record.

I think it’s becoming more and more clear that the persistent and consistent – in your submission you stated that it was very raucous in the House. Much of that ruckus was created by those sitting close to you, so perhaps you might provide some caution to the Leader of the Opposition and others who are sitting around that side of the House with respect to the level of heckling.

Now, unfortunately for the Leader of the Opposition, in this case I too did hear “You created the homelessness crisis,” so I think it’s important that the member apologize and withdraw.

Ms Gray: On behalf of the member I apologize and withdraw.

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

At 2:23, I believe, there was an additional point of order called by the Government House Leader.

Point of Order Rules and Practices of the Assembly

Mr. Schow: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the time I believe that the hon. House leader was responding to a question posed by the Member for St. Albert. The point of order was in regard to addressing the member directly rather than through the chair. It’s a long-standing tradition in this Chamber. Actually, part of it is rooted in avoiding what appear to be personal attacks. That member has been in this Chamber enough, for what I believe is a second term, is well aware of the proceedings and the standards that are expected to be upheld by members here, and that level of conduct is certainly unbecoming of a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

I do find that I believe this would be a point of order. I wouldn’t be able to state specifically which point of order it would be written under. Rather, just historical precedence in the Chamber as you have provided caution many times in the past, Mr. Speaker, about speaking to members directly rather than through the chair. [An electronic device sounded]

The Speaker: That almost is a red card.

The Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps you might be able to provide some clarification. The hon. Deputy Government House Leader did not provide a quote on what the concern was. As well, the Member for St. Albert, I believe, was speaking closer to 2:34, leaving me concerned about what was on the record and in the Blues at 2:23. If you might be able to . . .

2:50

The Speaker: Sorry. To provide clarification, you are a hundred per cent correct. It is at 2:34. I provided the wrong time with respect

to when the point of order was called. Certainly, the point of order is called immediately following the second supplemental from the Member for St. Albert. I don't know if you'd like to provide any comments. I am prepared to rule, but I'm also happy to hear if you have additional comments or concerns.

Ms Gray: Thank you. Please.

The Speaker: The reason why I'm prepared to rule is that I do have the benefit of the Blues. I don't find the Deputy Government House Leader's argument compelling because he makes the allegation that the Member for St. Albert was not directing comments through the chair and making personal attacks that weren't through the chair. That is not the case. However, what she did do, which was inappropriate given that I have risen to speak to it, is that – it was very clear that the member was using a very drawn-out preamble, and in fact it's difficult to ascertain if there was a question at all.

My point is that when members don't follow the rules with respect to preambles or otherwise, decorum in the House decreases. Members on both sides of the House like to remind the Speaker about their personal feelings on whether or not something is a preamble. I think we use a pretty wide swath, which I think is a net benefit to the Assembly, but in this case certainly it was the use of a preamble and not inside the context.

Now, preambles aren't something that we typically apologize for in this Assembly, but what I will do – and I think if the hon. member would ensure that the Member for St. Albert is aware – is that if there is a persistent and consistent use of questioning like this, then the Speaker's only other option is to advance a question and not allow the member to continue. Of course, I'm reluctant to do that because of the significant nature that that is. But if you will pass that caution along to the member, I would appreciate that. I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day Government Motions Equalization Payments

101. Mr. Kenney moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly:

- (a) recognize the results of the referendum held on October 18, 2021, where 61.7 per cent of voters supported removing section 36(2) of the Constitution Act, 1982, Parliament and the government of Canada's commitment to the principle of making equalization payments,
- (b) reaffirm the principle articulated by the Supreme Court of Canada in the 1998 reference re secession of Quebec that it is "the constitutional right of each participant in the federation to initiate Constitutional change" and that "this right implies a reciprocal duty on the other participants to engage in discussions to address any legitimate initiative to change the constitutional order,"
- (c) authorize an amendment to the Constitution of Canada to be made by proclamation issued by Her Excellency the Governor General under the Great Seal of Canada in accordance with the schedule set forth below, and
- (d) direct the government of Alberta to take all necessary steps to secure a fair deal for Alberta in the Canadian federation, including the reform of federal transfer programs, the defence of provincial powers

enumerated in the Constitution, and the right to pursue responsible development of natural resources.

SCHEDULE

AMENDMENT TO THE CONSTITUTION OF CANADA

1. The Constitution Act, 1982 is amended by repealing section 36(2) thereof.
2. This Amendment may be cited as the Constitution Amendment, [year of proclamation].

[VERSION FRANÇAISE]

MODIFICATION DE LA CONSTITUTION DU CANADA

1. Le paragraphe 36(2) de la Loi constitutionnelle de 1982 est abrogé.
2. Titre de la présente modification: Modification constitutionnelle de [l'année de la proclamation]

[Adjourned debate November 17: Mr. Toor]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by the Minister of Advanced Education should he still choose to do so.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. Thanks for recognizing me and giving me the opportunity to discuss the very, very important question of Alberta families' and communities' and individuals' future under the context of equalization. I want to be clear. Let's start where we should start, with congratulating Albertans – Albertan voters, Albertan workers, Alberta family people – who came out and voted 62 per cent – 62 per cent – in favour of ending equalization, not only ending equalization but taking the concept of equalization right out of the Constitution.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

What an accomplishment it was for a variety of reasons. First, there was absolutely zero get-out-the-vote effort from the government. There was absolutely zero get-out-the-vote effort from the Premier, the cabinet, from those in Alberta that are elected and appointed and paid to speak on behalf of Alberta communities and families and Alberta businesses. Absolutely zero get-out-the-vote effort to get that number high.

Of course, we saw people in postsecondary, we saw people, supporters of big government take the opposite approach, believing that every bit of wealth transfer is somehow necessary or important to their goals, get out and cloud the issue and make it so that it wasn't clear to Albertans just how much this penalizes our future and our opportunity. Again, when the Premier and the cabinet of the UCP had zero get-out-the-vote effort, it slanted the field.

But it does make me want to give a little bit of a shout-out to groups like Fairness Alberta, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, and third-party advertiser Vote Yes to End Equalization, that tried hard and were effective in helping Albertans understand the concept of equalization, understand how much it hurts our families and our communities and our economy and why it was important they got out the vote.

Madam Speaker, just as an aside, maybe it was a good thing that the Premier didn't have any effort in getting out the vote. It's believed that his low popularity cost the federal Conservatives 14 per cent of their vote in Alberta in the month prior, in the September federal election. Of course, everyone in this House and many Albertans know that he's polling at the lowest popularity of all Premiers in Alberta, down to Alison Redford levels, so maybe it was a good thing. Maybe it was the right strategy, but I wonder. I

wonder if a strong get-out-the-vote effort supported by a popular government would have made the difference.

Madam Speaker, what's also important is that this was the second time that Albertans were asked to come out and vote for a fair deal. I believe more than anything that the 2019 election, which elected the UCP government and sent the NDP back to opposition, was Albertans telling Ottawa, telling their government that they wanted a fair deal. They sent a strong majority here to stand up for Alberta, to fight for a fair deal in the Canadian Confederation. It hasn't happened. I suggest to you and I suggest to this House that that's the core problem with the Premier's low popularity, why millions and millions of Albertans feel he hasn't met expectations. He forgot why he was elected. He forgot to stand up for Alberta families, communities, and free enterprise, or he never intended to.

You know, Madam Speaker, I see it every day. I'm just reading about the net migration outflow of Alberta. My goodness, it was 12,000 Albertans that interprovincially left, 12,000 fewer Albertans because of reduced economic opportunities. I talk to businesspeople all the time, and what a shame how many of them are moving their money out of Alberta, how many are moving their money out of Canada because it's an unfair playing field because regulation and taxes are too high, because confidence isn't there. I can't imagine what that's going to cost our kids and our grandkids and our communities in opportunity and jobs, but it's happening every day as Albertans choose not only to not invest, but Albertans choose to move their money outside of Alberta.

Madam Speaker, again, thanks to all the people that spoke and helped Albertans understand why it's so important that we get economic freedom and economic fairness. The numbers were clear: over \$25 billion on average leaves Alberta per year, through Ottawa, for the rest of Canada. The number is that \$650 billion since 1961 has left Alberta for Ottawa. The equalization program started in 1957. Alberta has not received a dime and has been by far and away the largest payer since 1965. That is a long, long time.

Those numbers and those statistics really, really hit home when I discovered what a Calgary economist had said about how this affects our families, our incomes, and our communities. He said that because of equalization, Albertans' real incomes are 8 per cent lower. Eight per cent lower. That could buy a lot of groceries. That could pay for a lot of utilities. That could provide a lot of charitable income. Madam Speaker, he also said that Alberta's population is 12 per cent smaller, and our economy, our economic growth, is 12 per cent lower solely because of equalization.

3:00

Madam Speaker, can you imagine in rural Alberta, where we're under a population loss crisis anyway, where people are trying very, very hard to hold onto their community, their networks, their families, opportunities for their kids, and the social programs that are desired and needed because of that – could you imagine, if Alberta's income was 12 per cent higher, how much that would help rural Alberta especially but all of Alberta? A Calgary economist said that this is the effect of equalization. The \$650 billion out of our economy is striking enough, but wouldn't it be great if all of Alberta would have more opportunity for services and growth?

Another thing that kept coming up is how skewed the equalization formula is. Let's start with Quebec, the biggest recipient, and God bless Quebec. They know politically that the ability to push gets results. Hydroelectricity rates in Quebec don't count, but nonrenewable resource revenues in Newfoundland, Saskatchewan, and Alberta do count in the equalization formula, so against our free enterprise and against our families. What does Hydro-Québec mean? Hydro-Québec – I looked it up – \$15 billion a year annual revenues, \$3 billion a year annual profits, and it

doesn't affect their receipt of equalization at all. How is that fair? How did we end up with a system where our provincial government doesn't push for fairness, our Members of Parliament don't push for fairness? It hurts our families and our communities.

Madam Speaker, another report I saw that was interesting from 2017: the Fraser Institute talked about how the concept of equalization isn't even helping the recipients, how the fiscal capacity of all the provinces is now narrowed and Alberta has come back to the pack, how communities in the Maritimes are still struggling to get their economic footing, how provinces haven't developed all their resources and all their economic opportunities. Equalization has set a system where we're all poorer, all Canadians. I'm sorry. I just don't get it.

This was supposed to send a strong message to the Prime Minister. Well, he had better listen. Instead, what did he do? He scoffed, and it's our job to make him listen and make him aware of how important this is to Albertans. Of course, the first thing he did is remind us that his carbon tax is going to go from \$40 a tonne to \$170 a tonne. My goodness, I'm seeing inflation reports of 6.5 and 4.5 per cent and families that can't afford groceries and utilities and the basics. What is this going to do?

The Canadian Taxpayers Federation was so great, the night that they presented, on why we needed a strong vote to end equalization. Not only is Alberta the net payer by \$650 billion in the last 20 years; our Canadian partners are holding us back. I understand that the Trans Mountain pipeline is only 25 per cent built at a time that line 5 may be shut off and Ontario and Quebec may be in an energy crisis. Nobody is doing anything in Ottawa to help our resources get to Canadian energy security. We're not only being punished by how much we're paying; we're being held back by our Canadian partners.

This strong vote to end equalization is the start of changing that. Madam Speaker, you know what really doesn't surprise me, though, when I look at the UCP and the Premier's low popularity? Albertans are demanding action. Albertans are wanting something done about this.

Madam Speaker, I don't need to remind you and my colleagues about what a motion is, but please let me. A government motion is the expression of an opinion by the government. An expression of opinion. It has no legal ramifications in Alberta because it is not law.

I hope somebody is listening. I hope Ottawa is listening. I hope the UCP Premier and the UCP cabinet get going on this. Albertans want action, and they want it now. They want deadlines. They want a deadline so Ottawa knows we've got a certain period where Albertans need equalization taken out of the Constitution, as we've just voted on. We insist on free trade, and we demand resource movement. We're entitled to it. It's good for all of Canada. Let's not head headfirst into an energy security or an energy crisis. It's beyond belief. Madam Speaker, again I submit to you that this government's low popularity, this Premier's low, low popularity is because, more than anything, he has not met expectations when it comes to standing up for a fair deal for Albertans in Ottawa.

It brings me to clause (d) in the motion. I wonder why it's even in here. Wasn't this part of our oath? Wasn't this the understanding of why we were elected? The motion says:

Direct the government of Alberta to take all necessary steps to secure a fair deal for Alberta in the Canadian federation, including the reform of federal transfer programs, the defence of provincial powers . . . in the Constitution, and the right to pursue responsible development of [our] natural resources.

I'm flabbergasted that they had to put that in writing. We should be doing that every minute of every day anyway. Here's a government that is so lost that they needed to put the basic tenet, the basic strength

of why we're here, to fight for Alberta free enterprise, families, and communities, in writing. Madam Speaker, it explains lots as to why this government is so lost. They forgot why they were elected.

I want to digress a bit. I am grateful that the Premier asked me to be on the Fair Deal Panel almost two years ago. I'm grateful that thousands of Albertans in communities all around Alberta went to the mic, sent us e-mails, sent us texts, and told us exactly what they were thinking. Madam Speaker, 80 per cent of Albertans went to the mic and said: "Equalization is just the catchphrase, just the catchword. We want a fair deal in so many ways. We want to end equalization. We want to do things like have equitable representation in the House of Commons. We want an effective Senate. We want equal and effective representation on the Supreme Court. We want resource movement and free trade more than anything. We want to be a strong, equal part of Canada. We don't want to be taken advantage of anymore, and it's time that the Premier of this province stood up and made that happen."

Madam Speaker, I can't count the number of times a week – you know the saying: if I had a dollar for every time I heard. If I had a dollar for every time an Albertan came to me and said, "When are the Premier and the UCP cabinet going to start to stand up for Alberta versus Ottawa and a fair deal?" I'd be a rich man. It's just amazing that that is why they were elected, and that is so much what they are not doing.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any members to speak to Government Motion 101? The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Walker: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It is an honour to rise to give my own contributions and thoughts to this Motion 101, the equalization motion. So much to cover and, again, really excited to speak to this. Yes, the people of Alberta voted. This was grassroots democracy at its best, which is a great Albertan tradition, and they voted clearly to remove in principle the equalization element in the Constitution. I just want to say again, also recognizing that in my own community of Sherwood Park, Strathcona county they also voted with a clear majority that they want to see equalization removed, making these payments, thank you to my own constituents for doing that as well.

Grassroots democracy, Madam Speaker, has a great tradition here in Alberta. I know the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon knows that well, and I appreciate him for his contributions to that as well as for the recall and referenda we see with our government. We believe in this. We wanted to hear from Albertans on this very important matter, and we did, loud and clear. Now, it is up to the other provinces and the federal government to discuss this matter further with us in good faith. We are acting to get a fair deal for Alberta in Confederation now.

Albertans need a fair deal on equalization. That much is clear. It is not working for Alberta, and I would propose that it's not working for Canada. This is just another wealth transfer scheme, and it's not working at all, especially for Alberta, because we know – well, I assume the whole Chamber would agree with this, but I know on the government side that when Alberta succeeds, Madam Speaker, Canada succeeds. We have been the driver of economic prosperity for generations, since we struck oil in a big way, Leduc No. 1, February 1947, and we continue to lead the nation in growth, providing opportunity in individual self-realization. This is the story of Alberta, the ultimate opportunity society.

3:10

Now, we need a fair deal on this equalization matter. All the wealth transfers that have been happening over generations, money

in net, Madam Speaker, going outside Alberta, across the rest of Canada for various purposes that don't lead to overall good, strong outcomes, don't work. These wealth transfer schemes don't work. Billions of dollars have been transferred outside Alberta since the 1960s, over \$600 billion. Imagine what that money could do here, spent in the greatest land of opportunity, milk and honey, and capitalism in Canada, Alberta. We would create more jobs, a stronger economy for all Canadians to flourish, who would want to come here and be Albertans by choice. Sixty per cent of Albertans are from other parts of Canada and also around the world, and that's a beautiful thing. Let Alberta continue to be the engine. Let us keep as much of our hard-earned money as possible.

It works out to roughly \$20 billion a year net going out of Alberta down to Ottawa and funnelled to various other places. Quebec largely disproportionately benefits from this while not wanting pipelines or other natural resource development. It makes no sense to my constituents, Madam Speaker. It makes no sense to me. Doesn't make sense to the people of Drayton Valley-Devon, I'm sure, Lac St. Anne-Parkland, and all across Alberta.

Now, we need to understand, this House needs to understand just how egregious and injurious this wealth transfer is and its scale. Peter Zeihan, Madam Speaker, a geopolitical analyst – and I'm going to quote him on this enormous, gargantuan size of this terrible wealth transfer: right now every man, woman, and child in Alberta pays \$6,000 more into the national budget than they get back; Alberta is the only province that is a net contributor to that budget. Now, by 2020 that number will exceed \$20,000 per person, \$40,000 per taxpayer. That will be – now, wait for it; here's the ring dinger, everyone – the greatest wealth transfer per capita in the western world. The greatest per capita wealth transfer in the western world.

The only other place where we see things like that, that magnitude, Madam Speaker, of a wealth transfer scheme – because that's what it is; it's a scheme – is Saudi Arabia. The oil-producing region subsidizes the rest of the country. Authoritarian Saudi Arabia: we don't want to be in those sorts of ranks with a wealth transfer scheme that injures Albertans, and it doesn't work for the country. Again, I'm so pleased that Henry and Martha got out and they voted for common sense. They voted to tell the government: we need to remove this equalization policy in the Constitution.

Why is this happening? How did we get here, Madam Speaker, 1957 and all of that, with this program? Well, Canada is a political union, I would say, run by team central Canada, Ontario and Quebec. That's Rome, if you will. That's the metropolitan area that overall has the greatest power in the Canadian system. Everywhere else, according to the Laurentian elite, is the frontier. That is Rome, and we're treated as such with top-down attitudes and disdain. Alberta was born politically, with Laurentian-imposed political shackles, in 1905 by the Laurier Liberal government. It's almost always the Liberals. It's really something, isn't it? Wow. Even 116 years ago they did what they could to keep Alberta down.

Now, the people of Alberta have had to fight for everything that we have gained in Confederation. We've had to fight against Rome, if you will, Madam Speaker. Premier Brownlee had to fight for natural resources in the 1920s and early '30s, Premier Manning fought for the development of our energy infrastructure, and Premier Lougheed had to fight for our control over nonrenewable resources and also the NEP.

I really worry with this new radical environment minister. I'm concerned about an NDP 2.0, but let's see where things go. I'm concerned with what's coming out of Ottawa on that, Madam Speaker.

On this issue of equalization and ultimately responsible natural resource development, which creates so much of the wealth that goes into equalization, we have spoken loud and clear. We want to

now enter into discussions in good faith with the provinces and the federal government to reform this matter. Again, I say that, clearly, national wealth transfer schemes don't work. They just don't ever work for the parties involved. Why, Madam Speaker? They stoke division – okay? – within countries and breed a culture of entitlement and dependency to the recipient constituent areas of the country. Now, equalization, as was mentioned by the previous speaker from Cypress-Medicine Hat, was created in 1957. Alberta has not collected a dime since 1965. What is that? That's like 56 years or something like that. Yeah. We have been giving and giving and giving, and you know what my constituents tell me: we have no more to give. Take. Take. Take. Come on. Let's be fair here. This isn't working.

This Laurentian scheme – because that's what it is, let's be clear; it's a top-down centralized scheme out of Ottawa – costs Albertans a net \$3 billion a year. How much is that for Henry and Martha, I say to my colleagues here in the Chamber? That's \$2,600 a year for an Albertan family of four. That's injurious. We can't cope with that. We have a strong economic recovery. We loved the \$7 billion that was just announced. My area is on fire, my refineries, the Industrial Heartland. Alberta's recovery plan is working, Madam Speaker, but with that said, after 56 years of this program that doesn't work, we can't give anymore. We need to keep the money here in Alberta, in Drayton Valley, in Chestermere, in Red Deer, Calgary, Edmonton, and, of course, Sherwood Park.

Mr. Williams: Peace River.

Mr. Walker: And Peace River. We love Peace Country. Absolutely.

We have paid, Madam Speaker, \$67 billion into this Laurentian scheme since 1957. We're done. We can't do this anymore. It doesn't work, and Albertans made their voice loud and clear in October on this matter. Enough is enough. I call on all members in this House, the 87 MLAs – we are all so privileged – to vote in support of this important motion. Henry and Martha can't pay anymore. They can't pay from Rimbey. They can't pay in Sherwood Park or Calgary, Airdrie, right? They can't. It's over. This doesn't work.

This program, like so many government programs, of course, Madam Speaker – by the way, can I have a time check?

The Deputy Speaker: You have about four and a half minutes.

Mr. Walker: Okay. Thank you.

Like most government programs, this was supposed to be temporary, but they become zombie-type, fear-of-the-walking-dead programs. They never end, right? They just keep going. Go figure. Government programs are eternal, it seems, including equalization, but Albertans said: no; this one needs to be rolled back. It was supposed to be, Madam Speaker, you know, a well-meaning program, a trampoline to help provinces bounce back up to a level where they wouldn't be so-called have-nots. Give me a break.

This program has become permanent. It's a crutch that creates dependency and discourages provinces from becoming self-reliant. Quebec disproportionately benefits, and Alberta is carrying everyone on their back. Unbelievable. I think Atlas is going to shrug here, Madam Speaker. I'm serious. [interjection] Oh. I thought there weren't interventions accepted, but I will accept it. Yup. Go ahead.

3:20

Mr. Stephan: Thank you for accepting my intervention. I've enjoyed this discussion on Motion 101 on equalization. This morning we also had the opportunity to discuss this, and a recent media article referred to Justin Trudeau as Canada's first NDP Prime Minister. The question that I have for the member is: why do

you think that the members opposite, the NDP, are so hostile? Why are they so hostile, dismissive of Alberta's request for fairness in equalization? You know, they have been so negative. They don't get up and speak about it. They don't defend it. I'm wondering: is it because of their socialist tendencies, which are aligned with the first NDP Prime Minister in Canada? Why do you think that the members opposite just are so dismissive of equalization and enjoy seeing Alberta families and businesses get ripped off?

Mr. Walker: Well, thank you, hon. member. Through the chair, Madam Speaker, I would say thank you so much for that question. You know what? I'm going to think about this one. I think you're onto something, hon. Member for Red Deer-South. I would say that the central planners in the New Democratic Party really love wealth redistribution. They love all that, right? Karl Marx, all that stuff. They absolutely are passionate and believe sincerely that ivory towers are best at central planning people's lives. They just want to take other people's money and spend it. Absolutely. Thank you for that question.

Actually, I would say that when we look back at the NDP record on getting fairness for Albertans, including on the important matter of equalization, let's see what some of the members said. I believe the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, a former Finance minister, had said that he was, quote, agnostic on equalization. Well, I can tell you that my constituents are actually very, very passionate and have strong views on equalization. They want it gone. They want it repealed. I mean, yeah, they like to keep the money to organize themselves. They're central planners – right? – the self-anointed to plan everyone's lives. That's what I would say to that.

Then also the NDP, of course, defeated the UC . . . [interjection] Oh, go ahead. I recognize him.

Mr. Stephan: Sure. Thanks. I appreciate that response. You know, one of the issues or challenges that has been raised with equalization is that it discourages provinces from seeking to become self-reliant. I'd like to understand or get your comments on – I'm wondering if the NDP are so negative on equalization because they actually don't want individuals to become self-reliant; they want to have people stay dependent. I'm wondering if, really, equalization – we've heard so much about how it discourages provinces from seeking to become more self-reliant. I'm wondering if that socialist tendency to forsake self-reliance – you know, Justin Trudeau, first NDP Prime Minister in Canada. I'm wondering if the members opposite as well are being influenced by their socialist tendencies against self-reliance.

Mr. Walker: Thank you to the hon. member for the intervention and the great question and comment.

Time check, Madam Speaker?

The Deputy Speaker: You have just under four minutes.

Mr. Walker: I have four minutes left. Okay. Great.

What I would say: there's a clear conflict of visions. I would say through you, Madam Speaker, to the Member for Red Deer-South, a very principled conservative, that their vision is one of government ultimately providing everything. You know, we've had great debates over the last couple of years on choice in education and parental control. Their philosophy, I would say, is that it takes, quote, a village to raise a child. No, it doesn't. We know it takes parents to raise a child. It takes a family to raise a child. They get that in Devon. They get that in Calgary but not necessarily in the downtown cappuccino clubs in Edmonton, okay? That is what I would say to that.

On the culture of dependency, which has been ruinous for Canada, where you have provinces led by Quebec taking money from the wealth-producing areas like western Canada and Alberta, it creates structurally high unemployment. It hasn't changed in Atlantic Canada. It hasn't changed in Quebec. They still take the money, and they don't reform their economies or, especially in the case of Quebec, develop their natural resources, that would allow their level of self-reliance to increase based on an increase to their standard of living with advances in economic growth, I would say, Madam Speaker. Ultimately, I would say, including to the Member for Red Deer-South, that our philosophy and what I heard from my constituents is: you want to create a culture of self-reliance, be it in Alberta or Newfoundland or Quebec, wherever, and everyone pulls their own weight equally because ultimately if someone is reliant long term – you know, instead of constantly giving them fish, for example, you want to be able to teach them how to fish for themselves.

Equalization discourages that. We cannot continue down this path. The greatest jobs engine ever in Canadian history is not a government program from the Laurentian elite in Ottawa or another provincial government or even this provincial government or any provincial government in Alberta before that; it is the people of Alberta creating wealth and opportunity, governments getting out of the way and letting the people of Alberta create wealth. The business of Alberta, Madam Speaker, is business, entrepreneurs creating opportunity, taking risk, and getting our economy humming along. We just need government to get out of the way, and equalization is a set of chains on us that takes money out of Alberta to the rest of Canada to be boondoggled down a black hole somewhere for 56 years. This is utterly ridiculous. It's not acceptable.

Wealth transfer schemes don't work, Madam Speaker, anywhere in the world. In Italy, north to south, wealth transfer doesn't work. In Britain, south to north, that transfer scheme does not work. In Australia, west to east, it doesn't work. In the European Union it's now going north to south. They've decided – this is a big step for the EU – it will not work. It will stoke division. It will keep the underperforming economic areas dependent. It will keep people in those areas dependent on government that will lower their spiritual level, their energy, their ability to provide for themselves and their families and ultimately to create strong communities.

I am so proud that my community of Strathcona county voted clearly, as with the rest of Albertans, to remove equalization from the Constitution. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: I'm inclined to go to a different bench. The hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It is with mixed emotions that I rise to address Motion 101. To begin with, I think all Albertans, regardless of our place on the left or right of the political spectrum, owe a debt of gratitude to those who campaigned so diligently over the summer and into the fall leading up to the equalization campaign and vote. I personally supported the yes campaign, as did many others. The yes vote results in my region were significantly stronger than the provincial average. I think it was actually 75.7 per cent in the Peace Country. I think we also need to thank all of the organizers and supporters of the yes campaign outside of this Chamber. Particularly, I would like to thank and recognize Dr. Bill Bewick and his team at Fairness Alberta. They rightly resisted the temptation to turn this into a right versus left issue, and this wisdom helped propel their campaign to electoral victory.

The fact is that equalization is rigged against all Albertans, and due to these systemic problems the fruits of three generations of Albertans' labour has been transferred out of this province. As such, fixing equalization will help all Albertans, left and right, in the years to come. While this is an issue that the UCP campaigned on in the 2019 election, it is clear that Albertans do not see this as a one-party issue. With 61.7 per cent of support province-wide it is clear that support crosses party lines, and this presents our Assembly with a unique opportunity in these divisive times. If there is one thing that modern politics excels at, it is dividing the public. Too often our system rewards those who divide the public by region, by age, by income, by education, by religion, by language, by ethnicity, and more. This referendum bestows upon us that rare opportunity to unite Albertans. We can, we should, and we must resist the temptation to play divisive games with these results.

That is where Motion 101 comes in. I will be voting in favour of this motion to send a message to Ottawa, yes, but also to send a message to Albertans that we can stand together on the issues that matter most; however, I do have some concerns regarding the wording of this motion. The government contends that by formally recognizing the results of this referendum, the federal government is now morally and/or legally obligated to engage in discussion about equalization within Alberta. While that may be true of a reasonable federal government, I think we can all agree that on fair deal issues the federal government has been anything but reasonable. It was not reasonable for the federal government to renew the equalization program without negotiations at the last renewal date, and Trudeau's phony fiscal stabilization program fix was little more than a slap in the face to all Albertans.

3:30

Since the referendum results were released, the Trudeau government has shown no interest in engaging in negotiations with Alberta. In fact, Trudeau has done nothing but ramp up his anti-Alberta, anti-oil rhetoric by reannouncing his plans to phase out oil without even discussing the matter with Albertans, who roundly rejected him in the recent federal election. The message is clear. The Prime Minister rightly recognizes that to date the Premier of Alberta's action on this file amounts to hot air, empty words, and bluster. In short, the Prime Minister is calling the Premier's bluff.

Knowing what we know now, Motion 101 seems woefully inadequate. This motion does not set a deadline for negotiations to begin, does not provide Ottawa with consequences for ignoring the democratically expressed wishes of Albertans. It is exactly what the Prime Minister has come to expect from this Premier: empty platitudes. Furthermore, by failing to provide a deadline or real consequences, Motion 101 indicates to Albertans that this Premier is seeking to keep the equalization issue alive for his own selfish political interest rather than fix the real systemic problems in Confederation. In short, Motion 101 will not bring about the real change in its current form.

Albertans don't need an endless war of words with Ottawa. What we need is jobs, growth, and fairness within Confederation. For that to happen, we need to make real progress on equalization, stabilization, Bill C-69, Bill C-48, and the federal carbon tax. We need real action. The Premier has talked a lot but hasn't shown the meaningful action that Albertans want to see. With this recent referendum Albertans have given us both momentum and the opportunity to stand united, so let's not lose this initiative. Let's not lose this opportunity. Let's stick together, and let's make real change.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any members wishing to join debate? The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you so much, Madam Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to be able to speak to this. It's interesting that when we go back in history, even just a few years ago – it was a privilege to sit in this House in opposition and then, you know, to be in government. One of the things that I realized along the way is the amount of humility that Albertans carry along with them and their desire to be able to contribute to Confederation in a meaningful way. When you speak to Albertans across the board – I think it wouldn't matter which side of the House you sit on. Even if we understand how equalization is done, if we understand the premise of it, it is very difficult to comprehend and understand the way that Alberta is treated, at the end of the day.

There are many things that I could go into, but there are a couple of numbers, actually, that I'd like to share, especially with respect to our amazing energy industry, in particular. Albertans are strong and resilient, Madam Speaker. When we talk about the energy industry, there are a lot of folks who talk about, you know, changing the culture of how it is that we look at the sector, but if you go back 16 years or 17 years ago in Alberta – we've had specified gas emitters here for a long time. We've had taxation on emissions for a really long time because Albertans care about their earth, air, and water, and, in particular, because many of the people who sit in this Chamber have families that work not only in the oil and gas sector, manufacturing, agriculture, many other sectors, but they live right near the spaces where they work.

Also, the contributions to the social fabric of our province and who we are and how we take care of each other are very much tied into how we see ourselves and the sectors that we represent. When you look at not only how it is that we build our sectors here in Alberta but the jobs that are created outside of our province, it's a result of the oil and gas sector.

The reason why I'm talking about the oil and gas sector in particular is because it is used as an ability to actually talk down about Albertans and who we are. When you look at the sector directly, not only for what it does here and what we build – roads, schools, hospitals – the innovation that is done here, the impacts of what we do here as a province, and the impact on the oil and gas sectors across the world and how much better we are at it – outside of Alberta did you know that Ontario is the largest supplier to Canada's oil sands? It's really interesting because you would suspect that based on the way that we are spoken about and particularly even the previous NDP government – when they had gone overseas to talk about it, it was spoken about as dirty oil sands, tar sands.

Now, I'm not saying that there are not ways that we need to improve. The sector themselves would stand in very strong alignment with their environmental prowess and what they're trying to accomplish. They would stand in alignment on what it is that they need to accomplish. But to not have people in our own province standing up for the sectors that are providing \$1.89 billion dollars, Mr. Speaker, on goods and services from 1,100 companies, not in Alberta but in Ontario – that is the impact. It's not just here.

[Mr. Hanson in the chair]

I mean, we have been so unbelievably blessed in this province, and our lives and livelihoods have been completely shaped by so many of the sectors that I think a lot of us take for granted. Until you see commodities go down and you see the impact directly on the people, it is very, very hard – it seems like something that is off in the distance that you don't need to talk about or it's not a big deal. You don't realize.

My dad used to take me out to the field all the time, Mr. Speaker. He worked in natural gas and sour gas, in particular, so I spent a good chunk of my life as a little person going out with him to his field and being in the portables and collecting drafting pencils from all of the roughnecks that were out there that would make me hot chocolate while my dad went around and checked all of the devices that he was working on in the sour gas fields.

What was really, really interesting to me was not only how much these women and men loved what they were doing and their contributions but also their care and love of the place that they live in and their contributions to this country. Those are things that get lost when you're fighting for your right to be and who you are and how you define yourself. If you ask any Albertan in this province, "Why are we asking for fairness? Why are we asking to look at the equalization plan?" it's simply to be able to comprehend and understand why we would be looked at as an outlier versus part of the solution.

A couple of years ago, when I had the privilege of being the critic, actually, for the Energy portfolio, we had done a report about recommendations for reform on equalization. It was interesting because it wasn't about saying that this is wrong or this is right. It wasn't about that. There are lots of observations and conversations to be had there. That's not what I'm talking about. It was actually looking at reform and looking at comparing taxation take with spend, Mr. Speaker, at least to look and examine the fiscal arrangements and the possible chance for change.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

While I understand what my colleague was mentioning about the wording of the motion, I think that, too, along with what he was saying, the importance of this is that we actually follow through and get the other provinces onside with us. In order to make that constitutional reform, that change, we have to be able to engage with many others and make sure that they're in agreement with us as we go forward with this.

The other thing, too, is that when we're looking at how equalization is calculated, the nonrenewable resources are not included in that, so there's a disproportionate impact on Alberta and Alberta families. Madam Speaker, we can talk about commodities, we can talk about institutions, we can talk about all of the things that matter, but at the end of the day it's Alberta families that are being disproportionately impacted by a deal that does not look at what we contribute.

One of the things that I'd like to bring up is that when you look at the tanker ban, for example – let's take a look at that. We have countries from all over the world that are interested in purchasing products from Alberta. Why? A couple of different things. Our environmental and social governance is better than anywhere else in the world, so when you buy a product from Alberta not only are you getting a top-notch product, but the people who have worked in order to get those products to those pipelines have been paid well. Their families have been taken care of. We have excellent services in this province. We know that we're going to continue to do that. We know that we're evolving and we're getting better and that many of our companies here are also invested in renewable resources as well. It is an amazing and beautiful way to look at the energy sector and the alignment with the environment.

3:40

Countries from all over the world are interested in our products, but we can't get them to the shores of where they need to go because of tanker bans that are put in by a federal government that basically stops us from being prosperous in this province, which would contribute positively to equalization to help out the rest of Canada.

Doesn't that seem completely counterintuitive to you, Madam Speaker? Just think of it from that perspective.

There are a few other numbers that I'd like to share with you. Quebec also shares in Alberta's success, and truthfully every time Alberta is successful, Canada is successful. It's not just about our province, and I think that's what's most frustrating to Albertans and why they voted in favour of looking at the equalization program. They know that their success is tied to Canada's success. It is a privilege to be part of that success.

In Quebec – and this is not even regarding equalization payments – there are 400 companies, Madam Speaker, that provide goods, materials, and services to actually construct and operate the oil sands projects in Alberta. In 2015 – those are the latest numbers for the supply chain – they injected \$1.2 billion into the Quebec economy. That's outside of equalization. That is Alberta's contribution. Just simply, what is produced here subsurface and underground, the technology, the people who we attract: when you go down the pipeline, no pun intended, to the other parts of the sector, everybody is benefiting from that, every single person in Canada.

How many people know in this House – I can't remember what the name of the song was, but it was about folks from Newfoundland and Nova Scotia who came here who wear white cowboy hats, the cowboys from Newfoundland. Do you remember that? I can't remember what the name of the song was, but it was talking about folks that come from the Maritimes that basically live, you know, raise their families here, have kids going to the schools, and were a massive amount of the population that was living in the work camps in Fort Mac and all of those areas up there.

The culture that they grew out there – you know what it's like when you eat a meal across from somebody? It changes your perspective on everything because you learn about a person. Maybe they've come from a different country or even across the country. I mean, our country is so massive that cultural differences just from province to province are huge. You can imagine what that does for your growth and acceptance and love and understanding of your fellow Canadians when you're all scooped together in one area, creating this amazing product that our country runs off of and that also has the possibility of pulling multiple other countries and their people out of poverty.

I look at India, for example: 1.3 billion people and over 250 million people living in abject poverty – abject poverty – poverty that we will never understand, women and children who do not have the privilege of being able to just flip a switch on and have light, women who have to go and use a field in the middle of the night to use the washroom, who do not have access, whose lives are basically held in the balance of going out into the middle of a field at nighttime. Imagine if we were able to share their technology, their brain power, who they are, share our resources with them in order to help end that poverty.

My brother sitting across the aisle from me did the procurement on one of the largest projects in India for oil and gas and speaks eloquently all the time about the relationship between India and Canada – that's not just in agriculture but in oil and gas, too – and what that means to a country like India with that level of population and what it means to be able to help pull people out of poverty.

We have a burgeoning middle class in India. A burgeoning middle class. Wouldn't it be wonderful if Canada was part of the success of that middle class, to see their economy thrive and then, you know, attract all of the best brains from that area back into our province because this is where we want them to come? Imagine if that was our priority versus beating ourselves up all of the time. Instead of highlighting the incredible work that's been done here and using that work to elevate and to continue – it was similar to a

conversation I was having earlier with one of the MLAs from the opposition, saying: you know, who wants to come to Alberta? Well, everybody should want to come to Alberta. If we're not our own best cheerleaders, how can we possibly expect anybody else to want to come here? And it's not just about oil and gas. If we're going to take a look at equalization, we have to evaluate that cost of delivery and population needs – right? – because that's what equalization was supposed to look at, was supposed to evaluate.

When the opposition was talking earlier about housing or about child care, there were some comments made about how the federal government is putting dollars in and shame on the government for bringing in federal dollars. When did it become a bad thing for multiple levels of government to work together in order to elevate a province like Alberta? Why is that a bad thing? Do Albertans not deserve to get dollars from the federal government in order to be able to elevate our own people here? Instead, it's looked at as some sort of failure because you're working in collaboration with all levels of government to be able to promote and absolutely build on the phenomenal human beings that happen to be here in the province that we represent.

The various ministers worked really, really hard to make sure to get those federal dollars here, and they should be thanked and congratulated for that, not told that they're failing because they are leveraging dollars that are being put into this province. Just because – just because – it was done in a way that is different from how maybe another person has done it, does not in any way mean that that's a failure.

When we're looking at the fairness piece of it, one thing that I find very interesting and where we should be united – and my colleague across was saying this a few minutes ago – is that when you have that level of hostility, there are a couple of things you can do. You can either be hostile back, or you build from within. It doesn't matter your ideology – does it? – at all. You build from within.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members to speak to the motion? The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to thank the members who have gone before me with wonderful speeches, the wonderful speech from the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore. She made the case wonderfully for the economic union of Canada. The comments from my good friend and colleague in Sherwood Park that he made passionately, animated, and those constituents can be proud of that work. The earlier comments we heard from Red Deer-South, and I know he cares deeply about a sense of equity and justice in this Confederation.

Where I want to start today is this Confederation and who we are and why we have come to where we are now. I'm going to, first, quote from a speech given in the upper Parliament of Canada by D'Arcy McGee in the year 1865. He's addressing a Speech from the Throne on the union of Canada and its first makeup. I'm quoting, Madam Speaker.

We on this side, Mr. Speaker, propose that for [a] better future our plan of union; and, if you will allow me, I shall go over what appear to be the principal motives which exist at [the] present for that union.

This is, for the record, before Canada became a country. This is the argument happening on whether or not we ought to have a union starting with Upper and Lower Canada. I continue.

My hon. friend the Finance Minister mentioned the other evening several . . . motives for union – free access to the sea, an extended market, breaking down of hostile tariffs, a more diversified field for Labour and capital, our enhanced credit with England, our

greater effectiveness when unified for assistance in time of danger.

Madam Speaker, he goes on at length, but I think we see there the start of what has become this Confederation, an economic union that makes us greater together than when we are apart.

This motion today is about the union of Canada, make no mistake. I speak from my humble backbench in the Alberta Legislature to the Prime Minister of Canada: please take this seriously because the union of Canada is at stake, how many Albertans feel right now. The truth is that that union – and I'll quote my good friend the hon. Finance minister in this Chamber over 150 years later, from one Finance minister being quoted to another.

3:50

He told me once that there is not one bridge, not one hospital, not one piece of infrastructure, not one teacher, not one nurse across this great country that doesn't owe itself or its continued existence in terms of its post to Alberta's oil and gas sector. Every single one in some way owes its existence to it. Every single part of Canada is united and continues to prosper at some part of history because of what Alberta has done for it, what Alberta's oil and gas has done for it.

Madam Speaker, the truth is that that is an economic union that has kept this country together. Now, John A. Macdonald, our first Prime Minister, started with the union through the railroad, but, as we heard, he was talking about getting our goods to market, getting to ocean tidewater. Even in 1865 it was a consideration. It is more present now in the minds of Canadians and Albertans than it ever has been. The truth is that this economic union doesn't just stop at a question of dollars and cents.

The reason we as Albertans and we in this Legislature should and I believe will vote in favour of this motion and why that referendum was voted on overwhelmingly in support of removing equalization is because it's not stopping just at dollars and cents. It's because it's a social, a cultural, and a human consideration for us in Alberta to get a fair deal. Individual families depend on a fair deal. Children in school depend on a fair deal. The future of this province not just as the economic engine but as one of the places that has contributed as much as any other province, if not more, to our culture, to our history, to our sports, to the identity of who we are as Canadians – we as a province have contributed as much or more than our fair share. That's what today is about. It is not simply a question of dollars and cents. We've contributed so much of our heart and our soul to this country, and I believe all we're asking for in this, and I'm asking Mr. Trudeau to listen as we pass this motion, is that we get a fair deal out of it.

Now, I do want to make a few comments in French because as somebody who believes in the union of Canada, I understand that there are many francophone Canadians. Alors, Mme la Présidente, c'est important que nous comme Albertains font clair que nous sommes fiers Canadiens, nous sommes fiers Canadiens qui veulent améliorer le pays où on vit. C'est à cause de l'industrie gazeuse ici en Alberta que nous sommes un pays qui est tellement prospère et qui a tellement des choses à contribuer à notre confédération. Partout au Canada il y a aucun projet d'infrastructure, aucun hôpital, aucune maison, aucun poste d'infirmier ou enseignant qui ne doit pas sa création et son fonctionnement continuuel à l'industrie pétrolière et gazeuse de l'Alberta. C'est vrai que nous sommes fiers comme Canadiens mais au même temps on demande un accord équitable pour éliminer l'injustice de l'égalisation.

Madam Speaker, I want to continue by talking now about what has happened since this referendum was voted on. The truth is that since this referendum was voted on, we've seen action from the federal government. It's, I would say, sadly, a re-elected and now

diminished Liberal government in many ways from what they were before, but nonetheless they continue to move forward with their plan to alienate Albertans and decidedly point in a direction that is not towards fairness and justice for Alberta and for a more united Confederation.

The Prime Minister has appointed a Minister of Environment and Climate Change, M. Guilbeault, that I think is the most radical individual to have gotten a federal ministerial post in recent memory. I think his attempt to try and end Energy East, which was successful, speaks to his intention of what he wants to see for Alberta and for this economic union of Canada. He wants his way or the highway and no pipelines. He wants no development. I think it's an absolute tragedy that the former NDP government didn't read the fine print and effectively turned over the building of the Trans Mountain pipeline exclusively to the hopes and dreams of a crazy, lefty, socialist government that has now appointed a former criminal, for effectively climate terrorism when it comes to criminal actions, to the minister's post.

I have zero hope that that minister will deal in good faith to get a fair deal for Alberta. I can only hope that the Prime Minister finds some sense of reason and comes back to speak to Albertans and takes this conversation we're having in Alberta seriously. The truth is, if he doesn't, Albertans are going to continue to feel frustrated and alienated, and this beautiful country that was created over 150 years ago is going to continue to deteriorate in terms of relationships we have between each other, and that, Madam Speaker, will be a tragedy.

It wouldn't just be a tragedy because we're broken up as a country; it'd be a tragedy because the dollars and cents that we share with Quebec, that we share with Ontario, that we've shared with every single province across this great nation are a part of who they are as a country. It's part of what supports them, supports their bridges and their hospitals, supports their infrastructure, supports their social welfare nets. It supports everything that has made Canada what it is today in an economic and therefore in a human sense.

I implore the Prime Minister, if he is serious about being a unifying individual, being someone that builds a nation and doubles down on Canada being united, that he take seriously this conversation, he take seriously looking at how to walk back his insane position on Minister Guilbeault being appointed and his out-of-touch take on what Alberta has contributed to this Confederation.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I also move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 75 Arts Professions Recognition Act

The Chair: Are there any members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

Member Ceci: This is 75?

The Chair: Yup.

Member Ceci: Okay. Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to get up in Committee of the Whole to

briefly touch on a few points that I may have made and kind of following up from my listening of the minister when we did this debate – not sure when the date was – last week or the week before. You know, the 2020 GDP impact of artists in this province, I think I learned from the minister, was \$1.3 billion. An approximately \$300 billion GDP at this point in time, and \$1.3 billion of that is delivered by artists of all stripes. This bill, obviously, outlines and defines on page 1 what those artists in this bill are intended to be defined as. The first is literary arts; and then it goes on to visual arts and crafts; electronic recording media arts, including film and video, which is doing stellar work in this province at this point in time, as we all know; and the fourth definition includes performing arts, including theatre, opera, music, dance, mime, circus, and a variety of entertainment; and the last is artistic fields prescribed in regulation. The regulation has not been, to my knowledge, completed yet, but artistic fields will be prescribed in regulation as well.

I just want to go back to the first one, and that's literary arts. Madam Chair, just yesterday two Edmonton literary arts writers were honoured in the Governor General's literary awards as finalists for that award in the nonfiction category. Those two Edmonton writers are Dr. Norma Dunning – she's a U of A professor and author – and Jenna Butler. I believe she lives in Barrhead. I was reading up on her bio a little bit. She lives in Barrhead with her spouse, and she's written a book called *Revery: A Year of Bees*. They're bee farmers, organic bee farmers, and other things as well in Barrhead. She has written about her experience for the last year of caring for those bees. And Dr. Norma Dunning has written *Tainna: The Unseen Ones*, short stories about the Inuit in southern Canada.

4:00

I bring that up because that just happened yesterday, November 17. They were identified as finalists, and I wished them both well in their efforts to secure the Governor General's award, which would substantially help, obviously, the sale of their books. Both the Giller and the Governor General's awards make it possible for artists to, both in the award amount – in the Giller it's \$100,000 – as well as the recognition from the general public and people in the field that this is a substantial work of art that needs to be celebrated, do tremendous sales, and it helps them further their careers.

I wanted to bring that up because the careers of artists in this province are challenged particularly through the COVID-19 pandemic. Regrettably, this bill does not put artists back to work. There is precious little in this bill. We know that there are definitions. I read those out briefly. There are some undertakings by public entities with regard to agreements to pay at scale artists who agree to work with public entities. There are written contracts. It's a recommendation that "subject to the regulations, a public entity shall not contract with or retain the services of an . . . artist for any of the following purposes, whether . . ." It goes on to say that there have to be written contracts in place, and then it talks about how regulations will get developed for this bill.

We know that COVID has been so ruinous to many businesses in this province. There have been efforts by orders of government, whether they be federal or this province or local, to ensure that the venues for artists who are performing or have their work presented and other things like that can continue to be there because many, unfortunately, aren't going to be there once this is all said and done. Support for for-profit spaces has been inadequate. As venues, galleries, and spaces needed to be able to stay open to pay their mountains of debt, it has not taken place.

You know, the area that I live in has a lot of live music spaces, venues, and they're for-profit ones. When I ask the owners of those

facilities what it's been like through COVID, they sometimes are at a loss for words. I talk about the availability of support from the city of Calgary, the local council. I ask them if they've engaged in that support or the provincial support or indeed for their staff things like CERB, and sometimes they just roll their eyes and say: it's far too difficult, we have to wait so long, and the amount of money is inadequate. Being able to keep their lights on, their buildings warm, their staff – they're laid off for the most part through some of these times. To be able to keep people around has been expensive. They've had to have fundraisers. The public has come out and really supported these venues to make sure that they're around after COVID.

This bill, unfortunately, doesn't really provide any substantive help to for-profit venues, the ones that I'm aware of. What's really been helpful is the public. The patrons have picked up the slack, had fundraisers, donated their own personal items so that they could be sold. I've done that personally – I know that my colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona has done the same thing – just so venue owners make it through.

Now, when we were in government, between '15 and '19, we went down the road of listening to artists. In the fall of '17 and the summer of '18 government met with artists from across Alberta to explore many ways to recognize the important social and economic contributions artists make to the province and the quality of life that they engender here. We heard many, many things, just as I know that the minister had some consultations and heard things, too. I'll tell you what we heard and how it differs from what's in Bill 75.

We know that participants of art consultations highlighted the challenges they were facing when pursuing employment as artists. They discussed how the provincial government could potentially both recognize and raise awareness of the value of artists in Alberta as well as enhance their economic and working conditions. As I said earlier, artists bring GDP value to this province through their participation in it, \$1.3 billion in 2020. What we heard was that participants particularly favoured educational initiatives to improve the recognition of their contributions and increasing public value of the arts.

That's important because, regrettably, I think people in government, when they want to host different things to bring people together, take advantage of artists, whether they're performing artists or others, and they grind them in terms of what the pay for artists should be. I think we should all take some heed in that. Artists work very hard to hone their craft, and when they get hired by us, they should be paid at scale.

Scale for, for instance, a single musician for a couple of hours might be around \$200 to \$250. Now, that may seem like a lot of money to some people who say, "You know, they're just singing a couple of songs. What's the big deal?" But that person has spent a lot of time kind of putting their self together and their self out there. So I would just urge people here and listening to make sure that they find out what the proper scale is and then not try and lowball artists. As an owner of a venue told me, you know, "Pay them scale. If you want to tip them, tip them, but pay them scale. Don't think that you can grind them down."

The other things that we heard and just wanted to quickly say are fair compensation, increased funding for artists, and marketing promotion initiatives. Those are key priorities shared by the participants in our consultation. Many expressed a lack of support to succeed as an artist and noted that they would like to see improved access for training and development opportunities.

I just wanted to highlight those things because I think this bill could have been so much more than it is. It's come before us as a fairly lightweight recognition, and I think we could have done better.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

4:10

The Chair: Any other members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Minister of Culture.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill. First of all, just a little bit of a summary. You know, the arts have time and time again lifted our spirits during these very difficult and challenging times. The arts bring to us not only just economic value and benefit but also incredible social and spiritual and emotional value and really do contribute to lifting people's spirits. In fact, the healing nature of art goes far beyond the entertainment and the joy. It actually builds community. It builds mental and emotional health as well as contributes to our economy. I think we need to always remember that. I truly do appreciate the artists that have contributed to that, especially in these difficult times. It's one of those strange conundrums in life that it seems like in the most difficult times in life some of the great art stands forth and shines, and some of the greatest artists create it, actually, in times like that. I recognize the great contribution that happens.

The Arts Professions Recognition Act actually recognizes that art inspires. It defines who we are. It passes our culture from one generation to the next. We really do need the Alberta stories that are our life to be shared with the world, and we need artists to do that. That's part of the role that they play here, far greater than just the economic one. We need to make sure that it does have a viable career, as an artist, for those who truly choose that. There are many who will choose to be avocational artists rather than vocational, and that's fine. That's good because art is much more than just a business. In many cases it is, in fact, community. It is, in fact, our life together. It is the sharing of our culture and our being and all that we are. But for those artists who choose to make it a career, we need to try and make sure that it is a viable career, that it not only enriches our culture but it enables them to make a living, to support their family, to diversify our economy. That's why we've developed the artists recognition act, to formally recognize the arts as a profession and also to formally recognize the artists' representation associations as professional organizations as well.

I hear the members opposite quite often say: well, this act doesn't go far enough; it doesn't do enough. Well, in fact, that's because we consulted extensively with both individual artists and arts organizations, who were concerned that we don't overstep, that we don't do too much. In fact, I had a significant conversation just yesterday with the members of CARFAC, Canadian Artists' Representation, both the provincial lead and the federal lead as well as some of their board members. One of their biggest concerns, in fact, was that we recognize what they have already contributed and that, in many cases, they can contribute themselves more and better because they are artists, because they are the community themselves who have lived with it for years, who have worked very hard to try and come up with guidelines, with contracts, with the kinds of things that work. They were very concerned, in fact, that we would sort of try and step over top of them or undo or overdo what they've already done. Quite frankly, I'm totally onside, online with them because I think they are the professionals. My response to them was that while I hoped this bill went far enough, I also hoped that it didn't go too far. They very much agreed with me on that point.

Legislation can definitely go too far. Quite frankly, while I understand that the socialists would like to control everything, that they would like to be the centre and the top of everything in the universe and tell everybody how to operate and how to think and make them think according to their value system, not everybody in the world wants to do that. Part of what we're doing here is acknowledging the freedom of expression, the freedom of organization, the freedom

of association of artists and to recognize the professional nature of their associations because they know more about it than we do about it as government. We shouldn't presume to know more than they do. We want to recognize that expertise, that freedom, and their ability to associate in their professional associations.

I realize it's only a small part of the act in terms of the actual language used, but where we acknowledge in this act that we recognize the artists' associations, that is the part that I think the members opposite have completely missed. It's a little phrase, but it carries a lot of freight. It carries a lot of weight because what it says is that if we're going to recognize the professional nature of artists, we also need to recognize their ability to associate together, to be self-determining, to understand what their needs are, to work those things out themselves without government trying to tell them how to do it. This bill does not go too far, and that's very deliberate, and it's intended to be that way. CARFAC was quite encouraged yesterday as I spoke with them and talked with them about our joint perception of how far this bill should go and how far it should not go. I just need to clarify that.

Another piece that this bill does is that it recognizes their economic and their contractual rights. In this regard the bill does differ somewhat from the Saskatchewan model, quite frankly, because, again in speaking with CARFAC yesterday, the realization is that there are so many diversities and varieties and approaches to art that every contract needs to be different. The kind of contract you write for musicians needs to be very different than the contract you write for visual artists versus a performing artist versus a statuist or a sculptor. Every different kind of art's needs are unique, and each of these different art disciplines has their own association. Their own association works through the details of what they need and how they should do it and how they should provide it and gives them, already, guidance in contracts and provides contracts for them. Once again, it's about recognizing the important and very good work that the associations do without overstepping and trying to take away from them the contribution and value that they do.

The arts recognition act recognizes both the artists and their associations, and that's a very deliberate point that needs to be remembered and should not be forgotten. The reality is that there are some things that should be enshrined in law and other things that should not be enshrined in law, should be carried by the associations themselves, in concert with them. We are going to work together with them to craft and create the regulations so that it reflects what their concerns are because they're very concerned that the wrong people would put those together, misunderstand the fine nuances in the details of what their particular art discipline is, so we need to make it right for them by working with them on that, and that's what I intend to do.

Madam Chair, this is a platform commitment that I intend to honour. It's a commitment that will help grow the culture by 25 per cent, but at the same time it is absolutely going to respect the individuals and the associations that those individuals create in terms of how they believe these things should be managed. It's important that we do create legislation, though, because we need to keep pace with the other provinces. We need to make our arts ecosystem competitive with the rest of Canada, and that's partly what we're doing here. I think this bill absolutely goes far enough without going too far.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I will say that the fear that this bill could be an overreach I don't think is one that

anyone who's read the bill has concerns about. I think this is probably the softest touch a bill could have taken in addressing the significant barriers that artists are facing today financially and socially and that have been exacerbated under the time that this government has been in a leadership role.

I want to begin by correcting the record. Yesterday I paraphrased Michael Scott, and I got it a little bit wrong, so today I want to get it right. He says: fool me once, strike one; fool me twice, strike three. I want to make sure that I protect the integrity of *The Office* in this place and the quotes that I offer from it.

4:20

Thinking about artists – and specifically I'm going to keep my remarks at this point in committee to the performing arts because I think one of the best things about this bill is that it gives us a chance to honour and highlight some of the great things that artists are doing in spite of a very difficult culture and climate for them right now. They definitely have had to be extra persistent and creative in finding ways to stay alive and to stay engaged in their careers and in the community and connected with one another. One of the things I love most about the arts is that it is an opportunity for us to learn, to explore, and to be challenged. Definitely, this pandemic has been a huge challenge.

I appreciate that the minister had some engagements with artists over the summer, but I'm not sure how that aligned with the transition, if some of that was under the previous minister or not. I guess my key question would be – I would love to have some information about what types of organizations and individuals were engaged with and how many of them said that contractual protections with public entities was their number one issue. Was it specifically an engagement just about that piece?

I think that when I talk to artists, many discuss the frustrations they feel with a lack of government leadership when it came to being clear and proactive about what types of safety measures would be put in place so that people could feel comfortable going back to the theatre. In particular, I'm thinking about how many of us have not had an opportunity to . . . [interjections]

The Chair: Order. Hon. members, you may have conversations in the Chamber, but I should not be hearing them.

Hon. member, please proceed.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

They talk about the barriers that they faced in terms of wanting to ensure that they themselves as creators, as engagers, as artists were safe in their workplace as well as any patrons that might come to their workplaces, the ways that that could have been addressed to make people feel and be more safe when they engaged in supporting the arts in more traditional ways, including attending the theatre.

It has been mentioned that the primary piece of legislation that sort of guided this or was used as justification is the Saskatchewan legislation, but I want to reiterate that this is the softest possible touch in that the Saskatchewan legislation goes far further. It doesn't just require contracts for government procurers, but it actually says that anyone that engages with artists, who provides protections to artists, have a contractual relationship. It doesn't just need to be the government securing a massive piece of public art or hiring somebody to perform at the Leg. It would also mean that local performers who are at a pub or bar or park in a variety of communities would also have the protection of that legislation. I guess another question would be: why did the minister choose to roll back the protections for Alberta artists from what was arguably the framework around the Saskatchewan piece of legislation?

Artists have told many of us that their work has been incredibly precarious at the best of times but especially so during the current fiscal climate. Some artists have had success getting opportunities to showcase their talents and work in their field and have a bit of a better financial payday than other years, and one of the things that they've told us would make life a lot better for them is if they have the ability to stretch that income over multiple tax years. So if they have one really good income-earning year but the years surrounding it are far lower, they would like to be able to distribute that income over multiple years, because you're not always going to get, for example, a big public art opportunity or a big contract with the government. That's something that most artists aspire to and some will get occasionally at different points in their career, but it is highly unlikely that it will be consistent income for multiple years in a row.

I promised you that I'd do a little bit of a shout-out to some of the local theatre and performing arts in Edmonton specifically, and I want to take a moment to do some of that. One of the pieces that has enabled some people to come back to the theatre with greater confidence is the fact that the government finally acted on a vaccine passport program. I can tell you from personal experience and from conversations I've had on many doorsteps that a lot of the constituents I represent in Edmonton-Glenora love going to the theatre and love having an opportunity to sit beside somebody and enjoy that human experience.

The last opportunity I had to go to the theatre prior to the pandemic was at the Citadel. It was seeing *Six*, and what a powerful production that was: the wives of Henry VIII and the strong feminist and racialized actors, primarily, and all women on stage, with a very strong supporting sound team. Those kinds of experiences don't happen often enough, and putting protections in place for those who are visiting the theatre to feel more confident that the people around them are also vaccinated or have at least had a negative PCR test in the last couple of days definitely makes going to the theatre more enticing.

Let me tell you about a few of the productions I look forward to seeing. I'll start with the Northern Lights Theatre. There's a play by Linda Wood Edwards. It's called *The Great Whorehouse Fire of 1921*. It opens tomorrow here in Edmonton. I know that a lot of people are in Edmonton who might not be long term, but I think that that would be an excellent opportunity. The Varscona is not far from here – you just have to hop across the river – but a lot of great local talent, including one of my constituents, Sue Huff, will be onstage in that production. I hope that many of my colleagues feel safe and excited about going to support this exciting production. Again, a lot of strong female artists in this production.

I also want to do a shout-out for another play called – it's got the name of a member, so I won't say that, but the other part is *Hot Boy Summer!* It's a musical by Byron Martin and Simon Abbott – it closes on Sunday, so you still have a chance to try to see that – more of a musical and a comedy, a satire, I understand. I think I'll be there on closing night, so I'm excited for that opportunity.

Another one that is a long-standing tradition in Edmonton is *A Christmas Carol* at the Citadel. It was adapted, not last season but the season before, by David van Belle, and it's based, of course, on Charles Dickens' novella *A Christmas Carol*. This one, too, has taken a bit of a unique spin and has a strong feminist bent in it. I'm excited to say that one of the little people in my life who I love who is not so little anymore – she keeps getting older every day – is going to play Tiny Tim this year in *A Christmas Carol*. I'm very excited to be able to see her and support her in her development and growth. Like, this is big time, right? The Citadel's *A Christmas*

Carol is a big deal. One of the things that I think makes me feel excited and safe about going is knowing that I have my vaccine and that the people around me will. They've gone the extra mile to ensure that their crew and those who are acting this year also are vaccinated to make sure that everyone feels extra safe going and celebrating the arts in person.

I encourage everybody to take a chance to see any or all of those three plays. I think it's going to be an exciting opportunity for the theatre, and I think all of us have an opportunity to enjoy it now more safely. I wish that we would have acted a little more quickly, actually a lot more quickly, to put things in place so that more people could feel safe engaging and participating in the arts in person again and showing their appreciation.

I also want to say thank you to every single teacher in Alberta who works to support the arts in their classrooms and in their communities. I remember speaking with a music teacher a number of years ago, Roberta, who now teaches at the University of Alberta. We were talking about the high level of precision that you need when you're a musician. In many classes, getting 75 or 80 per cent of what you're asked to do correct is a very good mark, but if you attended a musical performance and they only got 80 per cent of the notes correct, it certainly would not be something that people were enthusiastically applauding. The kind of commitment that goes into fostering exceptional musicians in the school system and creating musicians who will sometimes pursue their music as their career – but the ultimate goal, I'd say, is that everyone who participates in the arts through the K to 12 system becomes an appreciator of the arts for their entire life. They know the kind of dedication and commitment that goes towards fostering skill or talent, including the study of music, for example, or performing arts.

I have to say that when I think about some of the biggest barriers, that I'm sure we will talk about more in committee and later stages of this bill, I think some of the biggest barriers are financial barriers. I remember a theatre teacher, the high school theatre teacher, telling me that they read a presentation for parents because many parents are nervous about what their kid's life will look like if they pursue the arts as their full-time career. She titled that *Three Roommates and a Bike*, because that really is what a lot of people in this province and in many other places in the developed world, in any jurisdiction, will have the opportunity to consider as their future.

4:30

I have to say that I don't think that's right. I think we should be finding ways for a strong, diversified economy to at least catch up to the national average for income earnings for artists, especially in a province where so many of our artists are women, which is a greater proportion than in most other jurisdictions across Canada.

When I think about the musicians who have the opportunity to earn a pension in this city as full-time musicians, the only sectors I can think of right now are those who are active in the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra or those who enlist in the military. I think that those are great career paths, but there are certainly not as many opportunities for people to engage in those specific career paths where they get to be artists full-time and get to earn an income that is fair and reasonable and helps them prepare for their future. Those are some of the things that I wish this government was considering when they were bringing legislation forward to this place, finding it possible for a good, strong, diversified economy, which includes the arts, to have people earning fair livings so that they can have a good quality of life and contribute their skills fully to our society.

With that, Madam Chair, I move that we adjourn debate on this.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 74

Advanced Education Statutes Amendment Act, 2021

The Chair: Hon. members, there are currently no amendments on the floor. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to rise today and speak to Bill 74. In Bill 74 we have changes to two acts, the Post-secondary Learning Act and the Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education Act. This is part of work on behalf of the Minister of Advanced Education to increase opportunities for the use of apprenticeships through postsecondary education. That was accomplished largely by the Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education Act, legislation that the minister brought last session, but he's making a few changes here to adjust for that.

I'd like to just speak a bit, I guess, about the principle that the minister is pursuing here, the value of additional apprenticeships or different avenues for apprenticeship in different areas as part of the postsecondary system. Now, last week I had the opportunity to catch an excellent piece on CBC Radio here in Edmonton on the morning show, where they were speaking with the acting dean of nursing from the U of A, Dr. Diane Kunyk. They were talking with her about the challenges that we currently face in addressing the critical staffing shortage for nurses in the province of Alberta. Now, nursing isn't really known as an apprenticeship program, but certainly it involves a lot of the similar pieces that are involved in an apprenticeship program. There is a good deal of practical experience and alternation between practical experience and in-class schooling.

Now, the acting dean identified three main constraints, three main blocks in the system to being able to train more nurses, increase the supply for the province of Alberta. It's interesting that she noted that they have far more applicants than spaces at the University of Alberta. One of the challenges is that each nurse, each of the 1,400 students that they have in the course of the program across the years, needs seven different clinical placements over the course of that program. It takes two full-time employees alone simply to find and manage those clinical placements. They need more of those available to increase enrolment. For them to put more students through, to offer more opportunities, they need more opportunities for that practical experience, very similar to the kind of apprenticeship system that the minister is looking to expand here.

Secondly, when those students are on placement, they need to be partnered with practising nurses, and they're finding that that is increasingly hard to set up, unfortunately, due to the severity of the pandemic, which this government exacerbated, particularly with this fourth wave, through their poor leadership. We find ourselves in a position where more and more nurses, frankly, are burning out and leaving. So even if they are able to find a clinical placement, they aren't able to always find the practising nurses to partner with the students to provide the on-the-job supervision and training.

Again, this is in the context of: what are the elements that have to be present in an apprenticeship-style program, as the minister is putting forward in this legislation to expand and make his adjustments here, recognizing the kinds of resources that are needed, the additional investments from government in order to make that happen? As I said, in the case of nursing she spoke of the placements for the students, the need for the practising nurse or supervising nurse to be with them as part of that placement.

Lastly, an increase in clinical instructors and educators. They, frankly, need more nurses to get advanced degrees – doctorates, master's – to become educators. Now, herein lies the problem, Madam Chair, with this government. They say that they want to have more of these opportunities in the system. They indeed talk

and, I'd say, talk accurately about the benefits that can come from this kind of apprenticeship system, where students get that kind of practical experience, but they are making it more difficult at every stage of the game; to begin with, this government's cuts to postsecondary education.

We know we have just under \$700 million that have been cut in terms of direct government support for postsecondary institutions since the '18-19 fiscal year. There's been no logical formula to these cuts; the government simply chooses which institution they want to get cut the most. If there is any logic to it, it is done behind closed doors. The public is not presented with the formula or the criteria by which the government is making these decisions. That means a loss of thousands of actual employees at postsecondary institutions, who in many cases are required to make these kinds of programs work. For example, note that within the nursing program it requires two FTEs alone simply to find and schedule the clinical placements, so if you are looking to expand this sort of program within universities, putting them in a position where they are having to fire staff is crippling their capacity to be able to support them.

Indeed, I would note that, for example, in the institution I'm talking about, where we have this kind of program set up in nursing, something that we have clearly identified as a need in the province of Alberta – we need more nurses; more Albertans need jobs – there are fewer spaces available because of the pinch points in the system. The University of Alberta has seen continuous cuts from this government. Their 2019-2020 base operating grant was \$602,232,000; by 2021-2022 that had been cut to \$488,754,000, a change of 9 per cent going into '20-21 and an 11 per cent cut going into '21-22.

Similarly – and I would note that these are all postsecondary institutions that have a footprint here in my constituency of Edmonton-City Centre – MacEwan University saw a cut of 2 per cent in the first year; they were spared in the last. NorQuest College: cut by 5 per cent in the first year, another 4 per cent this year. NAIT: 3 per cent in '20-21, 6 per cent in '21-22. Those are also all the institutions, Madam Chair, that contribute training and education for nurses here in Edmonton.

So right there, on the very front end of what this government says it wants to accomplish through this legislation, that builds on the previous bill from the minister, we see that they are already making it more difficult for postsecondary institutions to actually accomplish what the minister would like them to. The expansion of apprenticeship-style programs requires more resources for postsecondary institutions to deliver them, not less.

4:40

If postsecondary institutions are expected to expand this type of program or an existing program such as the nursing program to meet very real and present needs, which is what the minister says he is putting these programs in place to do, then these institutions have one choice, and that is to raise the cost for the students participating. The government is cutting the resources while asking them to do more work. That, in turn, then makes these programs less accessible, which again undermines the intent of the minister in trying to expand these kinds of programs, which is to give greater access to Albertans to get this training and to move on to good-paying jobs and to fill the needs, the holes we have in our workforce.

Secondly, as I noted, it's not only about being able to have the infrastructure for the education; there have to be the placements in the field. Certainly, the challenges we have seen that have been created by this government for so many businesses through the COVID-19 pandemic by its roller coaster approach, by continually putting politics ahead of public health have made it far more difficult for many businesses to be able to continue to operate in the

province of Alberta. Indeed, Alberta took the largest economic hit, far larger than many other jurisdictions in Canada, and I'd say that that is largely because of this government's mishandling and incompetence.

Now, the government has been talking a lot about their economic gains that they feel are coming, the announcements that were made last week. Indeed, it is good to see some recovery happening, but we are coming up from a far bigger drop than any other jurisdiction in Canada. We need to see bigger gains. If the minister wants to be able to provide more of these kinds of programs – and that is what his legislation here is attempting to accomplish – then they need to give some careful thought to the kinds of impacts that they have had on the economy. Frankly, we need more opportunities for students to be able to get the practical experience in these fields.

Additionally, as I said, the acting dean talked about the challenge that they have in providing the people that need to supervise and work alongside students that are doing their practical portion of this work, in the case of nursing noting that because of this government's mishandling of the severity of the fourth wave in particular, we have an exhausted workforce, so we are losing the very experienced people that we need to provide that experience and training for nursing students.

In similar cases I would say that it's also true for postsecondary education. I think of how this government left postsecondary institutions hanging through the month of August and into September as they dragged their feet, indeed for a good portion of that time, fund raised against a vaccine passport system before finally approving it, but then dragged their feet on actually providing the support in terms of information, planning, regulation to those institutions to implement it. That meant that resources that those institutions could have been putting towards planning for their students, planning for the course work, supporting the expansion of these programs that this legislation is here to do – those institutions had to expend extra time trying to come up with contingency plans, figure out how they were going to protect students in the absence of leadership and action and information from this government.

Again, I think that in many cases the very folks that we need to do this work on the postsecondary side of things have been needlessly exhausted and overburdened and are left with less capacity, particularly given, again, the thousands of folks within these systems that have been fired because of the cuts that this government has made to postsecondary institutions. Indeed, again, as the acting dean was talking about, the challenge, then, with that lack of clinical instructors and educators, because then those individuals have less access to – let's be clear. It's not cheap to do a master's or a doctorate. But, again, those costs are going up under this government. They are making it more difficult, leaving fewer people to run these programs within the postsecondary institutions, meaning that we are going to have a dwindling pool, not to mention the question of the quality of life in Alberta as this government continues to undermine the education and health care systems and social supports, making the communities less attractive to draw in those professionals from other jurisdictions to provide the educational level that's needed as part of these apprenticeship programs that the government purportedly wants to expand.

What it really says to me, Madam Chair, is that with so many things – certainly, I've seen this as the Health critic within the health care system. This government has a very poor understanding of complex systems and how things are interconnected and the fact that you can't simply make sweeping cuts in one area and expect that it's not going to affect anything else down the chain. That, in turn, comes from, I think, a lack of consultation and certainly a very poor understanding of what consultation means when you actually undertake it.

Now, I do recognize within this legislation that the minister is looking to create a new consultative body. He wants to create the minister's advisory council on higher education and skills. Now, unfortunately, in so many cases with this government what we see is that they pick and choose people who are going to tell them what they already want to hear. Certainly, again, as the Health critic I've seen this time and again from the MacKinnon report through to the Ernst & Young report and through so many other things, certainly on the embarrassment of what I would even hesitate to call a report on the impact of supervised consumption sites.

It's a pattern we have seen repeated time and time and time again, so now again we have the minister creating a new council to which, I suppose, he may appoint some expertise, but it's going to be incredibly important that they not repeat the same kind of pattern that they have repeated over and over again because of their failure to understand the impacts of the kinds of sweeping, rash, and, frankly, ideological decisions that we continue to see from them in so many areas of our economy and the services that Albertans depend on.

As I just outlined, using the example of the nursing program and trying to fill that critical need here in the province of Alberta, these are complex problems, and they do not lend themselves to the kinds of political, trip-off-the-tongue, simple solutions that this government likes to throw out while overlooking the complex impacts of the decisions they are making.

As we continue to consider this bill, I think those are going to be important questions to consider. What is the level of consultation? Who does the ministry intend to appoint to this advisory council? What are the impacts going to be as this government continues on its arc of making deep, sweeping cuts to our postsecondary institutions? Are they going to be left in any kind of condition to actually be able to support the kind of ambition that the minister is putting forward in his legislation? I'll be looking forward to further debate on that as we go.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and I want to thank the previous member for his comments. They were quite insightful and engaging and, of course, focused completely on the issue. As with a number of bills that have come across this House, it almost seems that this government doesn't know what one hand is doing with the other, right? The fact is that on one side they're trying to make improvements, but then on the other side they are creating all these crises, I would say. They're so focused on cutting funding, on just slashing funding from all different kinds of programs. At the same time, well, they say that they're trying to improve opportunity, but the slashing of funding on one side without providing any real alternatives to the types of programming that are being offered by our institutions doesn't lend itself to the quality performance that Albertans are expecting from the institutions themselves.

4:50

This is the thing, and the Member for Edmonton-City Centre said it really well. They just don't have an understanding of these complex systems because they're so focused on their own ideology. They think they can just come into government and just slash. Like, we heard it so many times tonight, that members from – of course, these were private members of the government caucus stating that they just think that government should just get out of the way when it comes to certain issues of governance. But what is government

here to do but to understand and provide opportunities – right? – which is what Albertans expect out of a piece of legislation like the one that we have before us.

Now, members on the other side seem to think that, well, it's about government trying to run the private lives of individuals within the society. That's their go-to, their framework, that government is trying to run your life and that you need to be free from this evil government. In parentheses, who's the government right now? They pick and choose their ideological battles on where they are and what they're actually doing in helping people. But cutting funding to educational institutions: what can be the ultimate goal there? You continue to cut funding and cut funding and cut funding and cut funding to educational institutions. I can only imagine, then, that the outcome is so that we can go down the path of privatizing education here in the province of Alberta even further, but that doesn't provide opportunities to everybody.

We see this across many jurisdictions around the world and even in North America. You see that not everybody has the same access to the opportunities, and, in my humble opinion, I honestly believe that that's what governments should be here to do.

I'll remind our friends across the way: government doesn't need to be painted as the big, bad evil of the society. It is an extension of community organizing. That's the problem with the way that the members across the way are actually framing the whole issue in terms of making government out to be, like, this bad, evil bogeyman that the average citizen should be afraid of.

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear.

Member Loyola: I hear one of the members across the way say, "Hear, hear." So he's in agreement with the fact that government, to him, is the big, bad bogeyman that every citizen should be afraid of when essentially government's role is to be an extension of the organizing that we do as a community, as a whole.

This is why consultation is so important when it comes to any piece of legislation that this government or any government should attempt to bring through this House. As we see with so many pieces of legislation that have come across in this session, the government consults to a certain degree, only hearing what it wants to hear in order to back its particular ideological approach. This is my major issue, that when you consult with the public and you truly believe that government is an extension of community organizing and solving problems that citizens are facing, then you can't put your ideology before everything else, because you're in error in your starting point.

I've said it before in this House. If you can prove to me that a particular policy is indeed better for the Alberta public, then I'll be the first one to vote for it. Instead, we see a government time and time again bringing pieces of legislation or proposed legislation into this House that are ideologically focused. Then they come in here and with their key messages just spit rhetoric in trying to support their bill without actually bringing any facts or proof or studies or anything of this nature. This is highly problematic. We cannot call this true debate if it's just rhetoric being thrown across the aisle over and over again.

While I respect that everybody has a right to their own opinion, Madam Chair, Albertans expect us to go a little bit deeper than just rhetoric and trying to support your own ideology and fit the statistics into what is best. Of course, a majority of Albertans believe that government is an extension of community and that the role of government is to actually organize and make life better for all Albertans and that it's not the big, bad bogeyman that should be feared. We have a job to do. We have a role to play, and this government should be doing a better job of reaching out to

stakeholders, understanding what the issues and the concerns are, what the problems are, and then coming up with better solutions.

When you're ideologically focused and all you're concerned with is just slashing budgets, how does that actually help the situation? Of course, the ideology on the other side of the House is that the public budget should be dealt with like a household budget and that future generations are going to be saddled with debt, but we cannot forget that education, health care: these are investments for the community, for the society. They are investments, and it's public dollars that go to these programs.

When the government establishes a war room and spends millions and millions of dollars trying to convince I don't know who about its efforts, those are public dollars that are being used for an ideological purpose. Honestly, if I were this government, I would be ashamed of that because that's not what public dollars should be used for. If you want to support your ideology, if you want to convince Albertans of your ideology, then use your own money; don't use public dollars for it. Every member of that caucus inside this Legislature should be ashamed of the fact that public dollars are going to try to convince Albertans that their ideology is the correct one. That's why you have a political party, and you should . . .

5:00

Mr. Rutherford: Point of order.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Madam Chair. Under Standing Order 23(b)(i) I believe we have strayed off the topic at hand, which should be the Advanced Education Statutes Amendment Act, that I believe we're on. I would just like your direction on this. If the member could get back on topic, that would be appreciated.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I look forward to your guidance. I have been listening to my colleague, and he has referenced Bill 74, the Advanced Education Statutes Amendment Act, 2021. I appreciate that you often give latitude, and I look forward to your advice.

The Chair: I, too, have been paying attention to the debate. It's been a while since we've been on topic on this bill, but this is a great opportunity for the hon. member to bring it back on track on Bill 74, the Advanced Education Statutes Amendment Act, 2021.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Debate Continued

Member Loyola: Good. Thank you very much, Madam Chair. So here we are with another piece of legislation that is making changes for the government's ideological approach when it comes to this particular issue. It actually makes changes to two acts, the Post-secondary Learning Act, and of course it amends the Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education Act.

When it comes to one of the particular changes, one of the questions that I had for the government is: when it comes to the actual role of the boards, how are decisions going to be made? As I was stating, when it comes to the government's ideological approach, they tend to consult seeking already responses that support their ideological approach. So my concern now is that when

it comes to the role of these boards, who is going to be making decisions on the apprenticeships? How are students going to be placed when it comes to these particular issues? It seems that this is an important issue, I think.

For people that are involved in education and the associated industries about being placed and where they're going to be placed and how the government intends to actually support industry on these particular issues, it is something of concern. The board, I'm hoping, will have true representation and not just representation from a select few. I'm really interested if members on the other side could address these types of issues or this particular question that I have when it comes to the roles of boards and the decisions that they're going to be making.

One of the things that we see is that there isn't necessarily that big of a demand, so here the role that government can play is creating incentive for the industry to increase their demand for apprenticeships. You know, I've had a few conversations with students specifically on how the people can provide the guidance for them throughout their apprenticeship: there don't seem to be that many people that want to dedicate their time to that particular role. The question then becomes: okay; how can government create an incentive to actually have those individuals, those workers that have the knowledge, transmit that knowledge?

I'm sure that for members on the other side of the House, just like members on this side of the House, when it comes to a specific trade or, you know, perhaps you're doing work around the house and you just don't have the right tool for the job, you know that if you just had that tool, the job would go so much quicker. This is the beauty of knowledge and experience and what the apprentices actually need. I mean, I don't doubt that the students are very intelligent. They have the latest technology when it comes to whatever particular field it is in which they are studying and working in, of course, but nothing beats that knowledge that is developed over years and years and years and years and years of experience.

I can tell you there's been many a time where – you know, I remember when I first got married, and we didn't have a lot of money. This was a long time ago, back in the late '90s. I had a rust bucket for a car to get me to work, but from time to time something would go wrong with this car. I didn't have a heated garage at the time, and it was cold outside. I had to fix a water pump on a Honda Civic, and I didn't have the right tool for the job. I remember being in there with this small wrench and actually having to use a crow bar, because the pulley would go one way when you needed to get that, and the water pump was right behind that pulley. Oh, my goodness, I fought with that thing for the better part of I think about three hours, three and a half hours. I was doing everything that I could possibly do to get that bolt off, and I remember when I finally heard it creak. I swear to you, a tear came to my eye, because I was, like: I've been fighting with this thing for three and a half hours. Now, if I would have had the proper training, if I would have had someone experienced, someone could have come to me and been, like: look, you need this particular tool to get that particular bolt off.

Here's an instance where government can be involved to help in the organizing of people with experience and those without. I'm not saying that they have to do the whole thing. They don't have to plan the whole thing because, of course, there are associations and there are other groups out there that will help in the process, but it has to be a collective job that we all do together and we all play our specific roles.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Madam Chair. Having heard the member for 20 minutes, given that he didn't care about what bill we are debating, I don't want to know what bill we are debating now.

Ms Hoffman: Bill 74.

Mr. Panda: Yeah.

I thought it's pretty rich, this member talking about ideology. In the 2015 campaign, right after the election, we all heard about which ideology you belong to.

The Chair: Hon. member, just a reminder to speak through the chair.

Mr. Panda: Not just Rebel media but even the mainstream media wrote about your ideology.

The Chair: Hon. member, I'll just remind you to speak through the chair. When you say, "your ideology," that is definitely speaking to a specific member.

Mr. Panda: Right. Madam Chair, because the member asked me to be ashamed, I'm just responding to that through you.

The Chair: Hon. member, I can certainly appreciate that you have some frustration over comments from the member who was speaking.

Mr. Panda: Yeah. So the member opposite . . .

The Chair: Hon. member – sorry – the appropriate time to address that would have been when the member was speaking through a point of order. We are now on Bill 74, and I would highly recommend that your comments relate to this bill.

5:10

Mr. Panda: Yeah. Talking about the particular bill, the member opposite talked about the ideology, and the member opposite talked about the role of the government, on which I agree. You know, government has a role to play to look after vulnerable people. Government has the role to not come in the way of people in creating the wealth and generating the revenue to provide for those social programs. But your ideology: I had the front-row seat there along with some of the members here in this House watching you, how you destroyed those opportunities.

The Chair: Hon. member, I will caution you one more time. You need to direct your comments through the chair. You cannot say "you" or "your" across the aisle. Words like "they" or "the member" are more appropriate.

Continue.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm a little bit frustrated because the member opposite was not restrained when I was being lectured. That's why I'm just addressing the issue again.

Talking about the ideology, government has a role in delivering public programs that would actually make life better for people. Also, government should stay within the limits of providing that help only actually to the people who need that help, not for going to individuals' homes and fixing their light bulbs or changing their shower heads. That's where I'm seeing an issue, Madam Chair. The member opposite asked us to be ashamed of a certain ideology. Every bill we are bringing in this Legislature we don't have to be ashamed of. The member, in fact – I'm just referring again about what I heard five years ago after that campaign, talking about Chavez, his admiration for the particular . . .

Ms Gray: Point of order.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Point of Order Relevance

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I rise under 23(b) only because you have repeatedly provided guidance to this member. Rather than speaking to Bill 74, Advanced Education Statutes Amendment Act, he seems intent upon attacking another member very directly and personally, which, I would suggest, is also 23, particularly (j), "likely to create disorder." For those reasons, I rise.

The Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Well, Madam Chair, thank you for recognizing me. I believe there is a long-standing precedent in this Chamber that a lot of latitude with regard to subject matter and relevance in Committee of the Whole has been granted, especially by the chair. While I can appreciate the remarks of the member opposite, the hon. Opposition House Leader, regarding relevance, I don't find that to be a point of order. Insofar as the hon. member's remarks on creating disorder, I would also suggest that that would be a matter of debate, not a point of order, and I would ask that you rule as such.

The Chair: Hon. members, this is a series now of points of order in conversations and guidance that the chair has offered in regard to relevance on this matter to more than one member in this Chamber. While a great deal of latitude has been given, it is clearly now being abused. I will caution the member speaking to talk about the bill at hand, which is Bill 74. It is called the Advanced Education Statutes Amendment Act, 2021. While your comments may be broad and sweeping, they must pertain to the bill. This applies to every member in this Chamber moving forward.

I will ask the hon. minister to continue with his remarks on Bill 74.

Debate Continued

Mr. Panda: Yeah. Bill 74, brought in with the intention of improving past legislation. I'm not going into that in depth, but I was asked to be ashamed because I'm using government money for my ideology. That's where I'm addressing Bill 74, Madam Chair. We don't. We're not using – if the member has evidence, he should provide that. Talking about ideology, when Tzeporah Berman was appointed to a specific committee, that was using public dollars.

So I'm hoping, Madam Chair, all the next debates will stay on Bill 74. If not, I use my legitimate right to defend myself when somebody asks me to be ashamed, because I'm not using any government dollars.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and I would like to introduce an amendment.

The Chair: This will be known as amendment A1.
Hon. member, please proceed.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 74, Advanced Education Statutes Amendment Act, 2021, be amended by striking out section 1(19).

The Chair: Sorry; you can go ahead.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. With this amendment – the Advanced Education Statutes Amendment Act, 2021, as all of my colleagues have referenced through their debate on this bill, is a continuation of this government's imposition of austerity on our postsecondary system, removing \$700 million from our postsecondary institutions, drastic cuts that have harmed our postsecondary institutions, and is paired with the new performance-based funding that is being implemented. Now, in Bill 74 the question of who is going to prepare funding and metric recommendations is going to be delegated to the minister's advisory council on higher education and skills. It's certainly a serious concern that the minister is trying to create a board or a council where he will be able to appoint who those people are to give him the advice to further the agenda of cuts and damage where tuition is rising and we continue to see mass layoffs on our university campuses here in the province.

This amendment would remove this council. If the minister wants to seek advice on the future, he can do that without this council, without having appointed people that he can then point to and say: these decisions are being made on the advice of my hand-picked experts. We need the minister and this government to focus on the challenges the universities have today, something that they willingly seem to not be able to do because with the changes they've implemented to date. With what's happening in our postsecondaries, we see an undermining of institutional autonomy. We see an undermining of their governance and academic freedoms, and we certainly do not agree with the idea of this council reporting to the minister on matters including strategic goals and directions as well as metrics for the performance-based funding.

Again, I will repeat: this government has cut nearly \$700 million from our postsecondary institutions. That is shameful, Madam Speaker, and that does damage to these institutions, the staff who work at those institutions, the teachers but also the support staff, the students who are looking to get their education. I would submit that this actually bridges well to some of the concerns that we've talked about during the Labour Mobility Act, where we see youth are leaving this province as issues of affordability and issues of academic independence continue to be raised.

5:20

This amendment would strike the minister's advisory council, and it will allow us to hopefully have the minister take responsibility for the actions he is taking, which has allowed tuition to increase by almost 15 per cent in this province, tuition increases that impact young families, that impact students, that impact the professionals here in Alberta and harm, ultimately, our economy. Alberta's postsecondary institutions are being undermined by this government, and this council that Bill 74 would set up is simply providing the minister a mechanism through which to do that. I certainly feel strongly that this amendment is a positive one that would improve this piece of legislation, that would improve Bill 74 and allow the minister to more transparently communicate to Albertans his goals and intentions when it comes to the cuts, the performance-based funding, the austerity that he's been applying onto our postsecondary situation.

The minister's advisory council would be just another hand-picked board telling the government what it wants to hear. We've already heard, thanks to my colleagues who've entered into the debate on this bill, a number of examples where the government has already done this. One that comes to mind, although we don't publicly know the results, is appointing a minimum wage panel, where everyone on that panel is either a restaurateur or someone who works directly for a member of CFIB – Restaurants Canada

even, I believe, Madam Speaker – although we're now two years out on hearing back from that particular panel.

We've heard other examples from the Member for Edmonton-City Centre. This government really likes to appoint people that will tell them what they want to hear. When it comes to Bill 74, we are just seeing more of the same when it comes to the advisory council that has been laid out when what we really need to be doing is investing in our postsecondary institutions, making sure that we have a thriving and healthy postsecondary across Alberta, particularly here at the U of A, where they've been particularly hard hurt by the cuts that have been inflicted upon them across multiple budgets.

Certainly, our Official Opposition has called on this government to reverse the \$700 million in cuts to postsecondary budgets; not only that, though, but to freeze student tuition rates, particularly for the duration of the pandemic. The 15 per cent increases create incredible hardship. I know of constituents in Edmonton-Mill Woods who have had to withdraw from their postsecondary education because of increasing tuitions and the pressures that that is causing in their lives, not to mention the other costs that are going up as a result of this government's actions.

We've also through the pandemic called on this government to stop increases to student loan interest rates, again a very clear set of actions that this government could put in place.

Finally, although with this amendment we are only seeking to remove the minister's advisory council on higher education, certainly we've been very clear in our call to end the move to performance-based funding for schools, where we continue to see an increasing industrialization of our postsecondary education, with business interests holding the larger and larger influence in what is happening in our postsecondary environments.

With this amendment I think Bill 74, the Advanced Education Statutes Amendment Act, would be significantly improved. Again, the biggest challenge we face is the deep austerity and the cuts that have been wrought upon postsecondary with tuition increasing and the damage this is doing to our economy. With the evidence we see, with an increased outmigration, particularly of Alberta youth – the evidence is clear that Alberta youth are leaving our province. What is happening by this UCP government to our postsecondary environment is easily identified as one of the key causes, yet this government continues to do that even though we see an exodus of young families and professionals from our province.

The bill in general does not help postsecondary. It's got lots of plans to make a plan in it, but here with this amendment we can make a real improvement to this bill by not setting up the minister's advisory council on higher education and skills and not having a hand-picked few tell the minister what he wants to say.

I hope all members will support this well-reasoned amendment. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Nicolaidis: Well, thank you very much, Madam Chair. Regrettably, I have to disagree with almost everything that was just said by the member opposite. The member opposite talked at some point about I think the term was an increasing industrialization of education. I'm not sure where that comes from. I'm not sure what specific government policy or piece of education the member has provided to make any kind of suggestion in that regard.

The member opposite talked a little bit about performance-based funding, which has nothing really to do with the amendment, but since it was raised, the member expressed her disagreement with the concept of performance-based funding. I'm not entirely sure

why. I don't think it's incredibly unreasonable at all to expect a return for almost \$2 billion of taxpayer funds that are provided into our postsecondary system. We're making that investment because we want a return. It's very clear. I think everyone can agree with that. Through the performance-based funding model we will provide very clear outcomes to our institutions and provide very clear guidelines to our institutions as to what we expect those outcomes to be. It was one of the things that our postsecondary institutions actually expressed to me early on 2019, which was, very simply put: just tell us what you want and let us manage our operations and run our affairs and we'll get it done. I agree with that approach, and the performance-based funding model will do precisely that. I didn't want to go on a discussion about that, but the member raised it as part of her introduction of the amendment here.

Regrettably, I have to speak in opposition to the amendment. I can't see what good the amendment does at all. It will remove the entire section that will establish the council on higher education and skills. I didn't hear from the member opposite any rationale why we should not have this body except for the reason that it's just going to tell the minister whatever the minister wants. That's based on some kind of assumption. I don't know where it's derived from. We haven't even begun recruitment for the board. We haven't even gotten anywhere close to identifying who should be on the board and who will be on the board, but we've already made the conclusion that it's going to be completely irrelevant and will just tell the minister whatever the minister wants, which is unfortunate, very unfortunate because we greatly need a body of this nature in our postsecondary system.

Madam Chair, I've talked at length in this Assembly about Alberta 2030, a 10-year strategic plan for our postsecondary system. Now, I'm not suggesting – and I've said it before in this Assembly – that it's absolutely perfect. I'm sure there are areas in which it can be improved, but it is the first time in 15 years that the Alberta postsecondary system has any kind of strategic plan, and I think we can all agree that our postsecondary system is vital to the economic vitality of our province and greater co-ordination within our system and an achievable and clear, comprehensive plan for our system will help move our institutions, our students, and our entire province forward.

What the advisory council on higher education and skills will achieve is clearly detailed out in the legislation. It says:

- to provide . . . recommendations to the Minister respecting
- (a) the strategic goals and direction of post-secondary [system] in Alberta.

This is to ensure that regardless of who sits in the minister's chair, regardless of who is in office as government, there is a body, a group of experts who are continuing to provide thoughtful, long-term advice and guidance and recommendations to the minister and the government of the day about how to keep moving our postsecondary system forward. This is a strategic body that will provide forward-thinking advice and direction to government.

5:30

I can't understand for a moment what the value would be in eradicating such a body and not ensuring that our system has a mechanism to think in a long-term manner, to think continuously about the future of postsecondary education. We need to consistently be proactive and forward thinking in our approach to come up with innovative, new ideas. How does scrapping the body that we give that mandate to help in any way, shape, or form?

I'd love to hear from the members opposite. I know the member has an intervention, so I'm happy to accept it.

The Chair: My apologies. There are no interventions in Committee of the Whole, but you can speak as many times as you like, and it seems like the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora would like to do so.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Chair and through you, of course, to the minister. I'm happy to try to answer that question, at least to some degree, because I have to say that I appreciate that the minister wants to gather ideas and feedback from people other than the minister when it comes to making decisions about the future of postsecondary, but certainly the buck does stop with the Minister of Advanced Education when it comes to setting the direction and setting the goals and the priorities for the postsecondary institutions of the province.

When I look through this section – I want to thank my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods for introducing it. The minister's advisory council on higher education and skills is what we're discussing as it relates to section 1(19) of Bill 74, the Advanced Education Statutes Amendment Act, 2021. When I think back to some of the things that we did when we were in government to try to address efficiencies and reduce the expenses of government, one of the things we looked at was how many agencies, boards, and commissions were set up by previous governments and how much they were expensing the public and if that was a good investment.

One of the things that we found was that often the work of agencies, boards, and commissions was actually duplicating the work of some other organizations that already existed, including folks within the public service that certainly have a huge role to play in bringing forward recommendations and ideas to the minister for consideration. I would argue that the boards of governors for all of the postsecondary institutions that we have in the province have exceptional expertise and can feed information directly to the minister through the public service around where they see postsecondary going and the goals that are tied to postsecondary.

To me, this seems a bit of a duplication, to be very honest. I understand that the minister's goal is to have a variety of perspectives and opinions, and I will assure him, as I'm sure he is well aware, that there are many perspectives and opinions on what would be the best for a robust public education postsecondary system in the province of Alberta. I think setting up, you know, a nine-person panel, I believe it is – the whole last section is around compensation. I get that there isn't pay, but it says:

- (a) authorize payment of or reimbursement for traveling . . .

There isn't a salary, but there is payment and reimbursement for travel.

- . . . living or other expenses incurred by members of the Minister's Advisory Council on Higher Education and Skills while away from their ordinary places of residence and in the course of their duties as members, and
- (b) fix the types and amounts of expenses eligible for payment or reimbursement.

I think it is fair to assume, based on this legislation, that people will be receiving different forms of compensation. There will be a cost associated with setting this up. I imagine that these individuals that would be considered already are part of Alberta's robust postsecondary system, and if the minister wants to reach out to folks who aren't to get advice, I would say that that's the job of the minister. I don't think we need to set up an additional board, an additional level of duplication – and some might call that red tape – to be able to receive advice to the minister about how to navigate the future of Alberta's postsecondary institutions.

That is where I'll pause for now. I'm happy to hear the response from the minister.

Mr. Nicolaides: I would agree that that is the job of the minister. I think that the minister should be doing that work and reaching out to different stakeholders, both within and outside the postsecondary system, to gather that perspective and develop the feedback, but again I don't think it's happened in the past. As I mentioned, through Alberta 2030 this is the first strategic plan in 15 years. I'm not saying that it's the best plan ever. I think it's a pretty strong plan. I think we went to great lengths to try and incorporate the genuine concerns of students and postsecondary institutions and others into the plan. It's the first time in 15 years that we have a plan.

When I look back as well over the 10-year duration of previous ministers of Advanced Education, I think the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar was the longest serving Minister of Advanced Education in the last 10 years. When you look back in history, there wasn't any other minister who was in the role for longer than 18 months, two years, a year and a half, this constant rotating door. How can a minister in that short amount of time understand the complexities of our incredibly important postsecondary system and sector, engage properly with stakeholders, hear different perspectives, understand the nuances about a very quickly changing environment of skill development, and formulate a proactive, strategic plan about how to move forward?

Now, hopefully – just half a second and I'll finish my thought – individuals can do that, but again I just look to the historical perspective. In the past 15 years that hasn't happened. That hasn't been the case. I think it's very important that we ensure that there is a mechanism in place that has their eye on the ball; that is, regardless of who's sitting in the minister's chair, what group is in government, there is consistently a body that is focused on thinking about the future of postsecondary education and providing independent, impartial, thoughtful advice and guidance to the government and to the minister.

The Member for Edmonton-Glenora is right that we do have excellent people on the boards of our postsecondary institutions, and they do their job well, but their job is not necessarily to think about the broader dynamics of our postsecondary system as a whole. Their responsibilities, which they do well and fulfill, are to manage their institution and provide direction for their individual institution, and they do that very well. Again, I agree that it's the minister's job and responsibility to help provide that long-term direction for our system, but I don't think we've seen it over the course of the past 15 years. I think we have an opportunity to ensure that we instill that long-term, strategic thinking through this body.

I'm sure the member has some comments.

The Chair: I'll go to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, then followed by the hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much. I will just say that the problem that the minister just articulated, through you, Madam Chair, was a lack of desired consistent leadership by successive Conservative Premiers over a 15-year period, and to say that therefore we need to create a duplication of expertise and services because Conservative Premiers decided to have cabinet shuffles on a regular basis and move ministers out I don't think is a good use of public funds, a good use of legislative efforts.

I think that having some consistent leadership, which certainly we did see under the time the NDP was in government and to date – I think this minister has been in the current role for about two and a half years, so perhaps times have changed. Perhaps times have evolved and the revolving door that Premiers put in place around who is leading the ministry shouldn't be the benchmark for why we need to create an additional level of expense and bureaucracy to be

able to achieve good outcomes. I know that people in this Assembly often talk about efficiencies, and again I think this is a significant duplication. If this is about helping the minister do the minister's job, perhaps the minister can find ways to do that without creating duplication, red tape, and added expenses for the people of Alberta.

I can tell you that a lot of money has been taken out of postsecondary and a lot of fees have been jacked up. This is something that we have seen consistently over the time that this government has been in place. It's only been, as we mentioned, about two and a half years, but already under the UCP tuition has risen by about 15 per cent in the province of Alberta, and that is a huge burden.

5:40

I will say that when you look at where these costs are going to be covered, it's the same entity, not the specific line but the same budget, as where the supports for the actual postsecondary institutions should be funded. Instead of taking money out of the pockets of students and putting it towards paying compensation to an additional level of duplication and bureaucracy, perhaps we could see a government focused on actually finding ways to make life more affordable for the students of this province.

I will say that I had the honour of meeting our Opposition House Leader when I was at Concordia here in Edmonton and so was she. That was the first time that we were on the same campus. I think that a lot of lifelong friendships evolve in postsecondary institutions.

I feel like I had a lot of privilege growing up as the daughter of two teachers. They really did value postsecondary, and they helped me start saving for it when I started high school. It wasn't something that we were going to deal with down the road. They had probably already been saving long earlier, but they had me start focusing on my saving for it a few years before I had to go myself. At that time you could go to postsecondary. You could be a rural kid in Alberta, you could move to Edmonton, you could have a place to live, you could have your basic needs met, and you could pay your tuition and buy your books for about \$10,000 a year. We are much closer to double that already.

We've seen growth like 15 per cent being downloaded onto students and onto families and then the government's prioritization around creating additional bodies to oversee the work that should be already done by the government itself. I don't think that that's fair to students. I don't think that jacking up tuition and then saying that we're going to spend money covering expenses and then doing other additional types of compensation or remuneration, which this does outline – it says:

- (b) fix the types and amounts of expenses eligible for payment or reimbursement.

I think that that shouldn't be the government's highest priority. The highest priority should be around finding ways to diversify the economy, which includes a robust postsecondary system.

The piece around expanding the opportunities for apprenticeships and compensation for people doing apprenticeships: I think that's probably fine. But I think that this is really about creating more duplication and bureaucracy and red tape, and I don't think that it is the best use of the limited funds that the people of Alberta have entrusted their government to steward on their behalf.

For those reasons, I am very proud to support the amendment that my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods and the Opposition House Leader has put forward. I think that it is fair and reasonable. I think that if we reflect on things that we've heard from government members in the past about streamlining and being more efficient and having less waste, one of the best ways the government can demonstrate that is by a commitment to take this section out, to entrust that the minister will do his or her job and that the Premier

will put in place somebody who can be forward looking, who can be visionary as the minister, because that really is the job of government, to be forward thinking and to be stewards for this province. I think that creating duplication and asking the minister to create a committee to do the minister's job is not a good use of public funds.

For those reasons, I'm very happy to support this amendment and urge all members to. I don't want to take the whole time because I want to honour that there are other colleagues who wish to speak to this, so at this point I will cede my time.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat.

Mrs. Frey: Thank you, Madam Chair. I wanted to start by just saying that this is the first opportunity that I've had to speak since what's happened in B.C. has started. My dad is actually working in Chilliwack right now. He's on the Trans Mountain pipeline project. I have to say that my heart goes out to all those people who are relocating right now as well as all the people who are stranded because I know it's probably pretty tough slugging out there. I just want to thank the Minister of Transportation because she's done an amazing job on that. I will get to the bill because I know relevance is super important, but I did just want to put that out there and on the record.

I'm looking at this amendment here, and I have to say that I was a little bit surprised by it because we hear the opposition talking just about every day about how this government needs to do more to engage, needs to do more, needs to do more, needs to do more. To me, subsection (19), the minister's advisory council on higher education and skills, is exactly what we need to be doing.

If the opposition actually read this section, they would see that in subsection (3) it's talking about the people who cannot serve on this board. Maybe the minister can correct me, but this would allude to people who are not generally part of an academic setting, people who could be advising on new technologies, on new things that we should be doing in institutions, kind of be forward thinking towards 2030, to be expanding our horizons in postsecondary institutions and to be finding new ways to solve old problems that have been existing for a long time. To me, that's exactly what we should be doing as government. We should be finding ways to include more people, finding ways to think differently, finding ways to include more people in decision-making processes.

To me, this isn't a paid position. In subsection (4) it says, "A member of the Minister's Advisory Council on Higher Education and Skills shall not receive remuneration." Yes, it does follow by saying that there would be – I see subsection (5). The Member for Edmonton-Glenora did point out that there would be, you know, authorized payment or reimbursement for travelling. This is a pretty standard practice in government for any board or commission that is involved in government.

Then she did allude to the fact that the previous government had cut down on appointments, but what she fails to mention and, I believe, has often failed to mention – well, I wouldn't be very proud of it either – is that one of their most prized appointments during government, who, news flash, did receive compensation, I'm assuming something in this form, an authorized payment or reimbursement for travelling, et cetera, would be Tzeponah Berman. Perhaps they're a little bit sensitive about their appointment process and about having people on government boards and commissions because they're concerned that it would bring up their old record of appointing an antipipeline activist, somebody who wants to keep it in the ground, somebody who goes with their – what is it? Like, a cup of, whatever, socialism takes capitalism away. I don't know.

Their former Minister of Environment and Climate Change had something silly written in a book like that.

I also know that this minister's advisory council does not allow for union representation. Now, I'm not very good at reading these things, but let me try to figure it out. Subsection (19) with (3)(iv). Now I need glasses. Sorry, guys. "A bargaining agent representing the employees of a public post-secondary institution or of a private post-secondary institution." That would mean that people like Gil McGowan couldn't serve on that board. Perhaps that's why they're concerned about this. That would also mean that – you know, I am quite confused. [interjections] Yeah. Well, that is true. I'm noting that members on this side are pointing out that Gil McGowan, the man who referred to Alberta parents as something along the lines of nut jobs . . .

Mr. Schow: Religious nutbars.

Mrs. Frey: Religious nutbars. Right. I remember that. That was a soft moment in our history, I guess.

. . . actually sits on the Alberta NDP provincial board, well, as close as you can to a provincial board, so I understand why they'd be a little sensitive about talking about committees and their record of committee appointments.

You know, I think that we should be voting against this amendment because I know that for places like Brooks-Medicine Hat it's great that we have this forward-thinking legislation. I'm thinking of the microcredentialing that's coming with Bill 74. Medicine Hat College is actually going to be able to provide much-needed programming that they can pivot and put on a dime and talk about things like agriculture, which is essential to our region, talk about new and emerging technologies, talk about ways to certify more people and bring more people into the fold and into the postsecondary framework.

We know that it's been historic that postsecondary has left a lot of people out. It's been this kind of ivory tower elite class, but what we know is that every – every – kind of postsecondary education you can get, whether that is a trade certificate, whether that is a microcredentialing program, whether that's a course you can take or that's a diploma, is extremely important. My cousin right now actually lives with a disability, and she is taking a program at Medicine Hat College right now that is helping her with financial literacy and comprehension. Like, these are the kinds of things that our postsecondary institutions should be doing, which is bringing more people in, which is why, if we have advisers like that on our postsecondary boards – back to the point of this – we can have more voices at the table, and I think that's what we all should want.

You know, Madam Chair, I have to say that I'm very proud of this minister because he came to Medicine Hat and met with Medicine Hat College's chair and board of directors and our president, Mr. Shufflebotham, and it was such a great meeting. We were able to speak productively about the issues that are facing Medicine Hat College and especially the Brooks campus and ways that we can be expanding postsecondary to include more people and to cast our nets a little bit wider and try to figure out how we can make postsecondary learning relevant and modern and keep it going for decades to come.

5:50

You know, I understand that the members opposite don't want to talk about board appointments when they have people like Tzeponah Berman in their history books. I can understand why they don't want to talk about panels and appointments when usually what we're talking about in here is Gil McGowan and the things that he's saying online. I can understand that they don't want that forward-

thinking advice from industry because, well, they're the ones who chased industry out of this province, Madam Chair. I also find it a little bit rich that the members opposite kind of allude to the cost of living when we're talking about postsecondary education because I know that one of the things that drove up the cost of living during their time in government was their carbon tax, which was a tax on everything.

I think it's very, very important, but we know that we have to find new ways to solve old problems, and one of those ways that we can do this is by appointing boards and commissions to advise ministers by bringing more people into the fold. So, Madam Chair, I would submit that we should all be opposing this amendment and supporting the creation of such a body, that would provide more advice to the minister and provide an industry perspective, provide a new perspective on higher education.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to this thoughtful amendment from my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods. We've had a bit of discussion on this, and we have heard a bit from the government side, so I wanted to address a few of the things that we've heard as we talk about the purpose of this council and indeed, as part of that, the direction and decisions of this minister.

He spoke to some of the concerns that were raised by some of my colleagues about performance-based funding and his drive for that, which would be supported by the moves that he is making within this bill and, I'm sure, would be an ongoing topic of discussion with the minister's advisory council. He framed it in saying that, you know, Albertans should be able to expect accountability. A good return on over \$2 billion invested in our taxpayer-funded system, I believe, were the minister's words.

But, again, Madam Chair, it's a situation where we have a repeated pattern with this government of accountability for thee but not for me. This minister sat at the table where his government made the decision to put, well, about \$1.3 billion, nearly three-quarters of that postsecondary investment, at risk, gambled it on the re-election of President Donald Trump, a bad bet that failed. Where is that minister's accountability to taxpayers for their return on that failed gamble? But he feels that postsecondary institutions should bear the burden of his government's decisions. So that is what concerns me when we are talking about the judgment of this particular minister in these kinds of decisions that he's making. Time and again we have seen that this is a government that is willing to put their political opportunity and ideology ahead of the public good while telling others that they need to shape up and do better. That is a failure, I think, of leadership.

In considering some of the other debate that we've had here, you know, the Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat talked about the requirement of who could serve on this council and talked about the value of having people from outside the postsecondary system provide perspective. Indeed, in some cases, Madam Chair, I believe that can be the case. But I've also seen how detrimental this government's approach on that could be; their approach in the health care system, for example, where they have chosen to move forward based on an accountant's analysis of the health care system without any consideration of the actual impacts of what some of those decisions mean. We saw that with the MacKinnon report, we saw that again with the EY report, and we saw how disastrous it's been as this government has continued to pursue that in the midst of a public health crisis.

Again, I think we have to give careful consideration to what this minister's intent is in setting up this council. This minister talked about the strategy 2030, and let's remember. Now, he has just spent \$3.7 million on a contract to an American consulting firm, McKinsey & Company, to develop that 2030 strategy. That is in itself the long-term strategy, and this minister has an entire department of public servants and officials whose job it is to provide the perspective to this minister on how to implement that strategy. That is their job. They are paid on behalf of the people of Alberta to support this ministry in a nonpartisan manner to accomplish those goals. Now, that is not to say that I'm suggesting that this minister should move forward simply based on the recommendations of public servants. Indeed, no. It is important that we continue to consult and speak with Albertans. Again I would say that this government's record on that point is a very poor one.

I will give this minister credit, though, that in the opportunities I've had to speak with student leaders and others, they have reflected that even if the minister does not often take what they have to say and put it into action, he at least does show up and listen. So give him credit on that count. But that is a power and ability that he continues to have without creating an entirely new council to do that work. He can continue to meet with postsecondary leaders. He can continue to sit down with business leaders. He can continue to sit down with everyone he chooses within the province of Alberta without creating the additional infrastructure and potential cost of a minister's advisory council.

The minister talked about needing to build that further long-term vision, long-term strategy. That is not something I'm against. Certainly, I would love to see this government use far more of that kind of thinking. Once again, their response to the COVID-19 pandemic showed incredibly little thought about the long-term impacts of their decisions, incredibly short-term thinking. Indeed, wrapped up in their own political infighting, they completely lost sight of the ball. But so far I am not convinced that this additional advisory council is needed for the minister to accomplish that. He has laid out a significant strategy, which did not require him to create a council to do. I mean, it did require that \$3.7 million contract, which, again, seems to be habitual for this government.

We just learned of another contract today, to Ernst & Young, to determine how we expand our ICU capacity, something that's the mandate of the new Health minister. It's surprising that this far along he's just begun that work by contracting it out when, again, we have an entire public service whose job it is, who knows these systems, who can do that work.

That aside, we are talking here about Advanced Education. I appreciate what the minister was saying about a constantly rotating door of Advanced Education ministers. Indeed, that was an issue in the health care system here in the province of Alberta for a number of years, too, under Conservative governments, for whom there was far too much playing politics and experimenting with different approaches and different directions, that caused chaos in the system, that, frankly, ticked up costs and made it far more difficult for us to build a good and efficient system. In that respect I can see the value in having a long-term strategy. Now, the rub of that, of course, is: what is, in fact, the strategy to do and accomplish? What is the impact that it's actually going to have on our postsecondary system?

That is our concern with this minister's advisory council. We have seen this repeatedly with this government. I would remind the Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat that this government does not have the best record on who it appoints. If we talk about Mr. Chris Champion and his work on the disgusting curriculum that this government is insisting on trying to force through in the province of

Alberta, there is a vast majority of Albertans who are not terribly big fans of that work.

We certainly have good reason to question whether this particular council and appointment would be one of the good ones, like, frankly, the council that was mentioned today in looking at the problem of homelessness. I will say that, as redundant as it may feel in some respects given the amount of study that's been done, there are a number of very excellent appointments on that committee. But we have a wide number of situations where the government has done precisely the opposite, instead simply appointing their friends

and allies and individuals to tell them what they already wanted to hear. We have seen that repeatedly, and I am concerned that that is what we are going to see again here as this government works on, frankly, a profound transformation of our postsecondary institutions.

The Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt. It is now 6 p.m. According to Standing Order 4(4) the committee stands recessed until 7:30 this evening.

[The committee adjourned at 6 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Statement by the Speaker	
Alert Ready Emergency System Test	6207
Members' Statements	
Canadian Men's National Soccer Team	6207
Rural Bus Service	6207
Front-line Workers' Mental Health	6207
Economic Recovery.....	6208
COP 26 Climate Change Conference and Federal Energy Policies	6208
Arts and Culture Industries.....	6208
Teacher Accountability.....	6208
Disaster Preparedness.....	6209
Emergency Medical Services	6209
Oral Question Period	
COVID-19 Response and Vaccination of Children.....	6209
COVID-19 Response and Vaccination Rates	6210
Emergency Shelters and Affordable Housing.....	6211
United Conservative Party.....	6211
Irrigation Infrastructure	6212
Restrictions Exemption Program Implementation Grant.....	6212
Municipal Funding	6213
Economic Recovery and Job Creation.....	6214
British Columbia Floods and Mudslides.....	6214
Agricultural Concerns	6215
Physician Services in Fort McMurray	6215
Wetaskiwin Homeless Encampment and Affordable Housing	6216
Medical Laboratory Services in Lethbridge.....	6216
Federal-provincial Child Care Agreement.....	6217
Introduction of Bills	
Bill 86 Electricity Statutes Amendment Act, 2021.....	6218
Orders of the Day	6219
Government Motions	
Equalization Payments	6219
Government Bills and Orders	
Committee of the Whole	
Bill 75 Arts Professions Recognition Act.....	6226
Bill 74 Advanced Education Statutes Amendment Act, 2021	6230

Alberta Hansard is available online at www.assembly.ab.ca

For inquiries contact:

Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875

E-mail: AlbertaHansard@assembly.ab.ca