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The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, November 22, 2021

Day 129

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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Party standings:

United Conservative: 20

New Democrat: 24

Independent: 2

Vacant: 1

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Rick Wilson	Minister of Indigenous Relations
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Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, November 22, 2021

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

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

Recording:

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Ministerial Statements

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

Oil and Gas Pipeline Opposition

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to give a ministerial statement on a very important issue. Our pipelines are the safest and most efficient way to export ethical Alberta oil all across the continent. David Suzuki is so out of touch with the real world that he advocates for eco-terrorism towards Canadian people and industries. This is completely unacceptable and extremely reckless. The NDP, sadly, have a long history of collaborating with David Suzuki, and their silence on his outrageous comments makes them complicit with calls for eco-terrorism towards Albertans and Canadians. Alberta's oil and gas industry along with Alberta's government have developed innovative technologies that actually impact the environment. The destruction of our pipelines is eco-terrorism. It must be rebuked by everyone in this country.

Mr. Speaker, it is statements like this that caused Alberta's government to bring in Bill 1, the Critical Infrastructure Defence Act. We must protect our critical infrastructure and not allow these ridiculous, ideological menaces to destroy what Albertans have worked so hard to create. Now, I am fortunate that I have an opportunity now to speak to the despicable remarks of David Suzuki. However, my view is that every member of this House should have the opportunity to speak to this and to consider a motion to condemn David Suzuki's disgusting remarks. I will as Government House Leader, later today, move such a motion in this Chamber.

It's important to note that David Suzuki doesn't just hate pipelines that want to carry the most ethically produced oil for export around the world. The truth is that David Suzuki hates Alberta. David Suzuki has compared Alberta's oil and gas industry to slavery in the past, which is despicable on its own, but now he has said the following

to CHEK News in Vancouver this past Saturday. Suzuki said, and I quote, Mr. Speaker: there are going to be pipelines blowing up. He goes on to say: I saw the power of civil disobedience. Then he says: people in Extinction Rebellion are saying that we're headed in the direction of extinction, and we're rebelling against it; that's why I'm here.

Mr. Speaker, talking about extinction, rebellion, blowing up pipelines, and dog whistles like this are inciting environmental terrorism. I will not stand for these kinds of remarks or comments in my country or my province, and I hope all members of the Chamber agree. Alberta's government is working as we speak to take further action to protect our critical infrastructure that keeps Alberta's prosperity strong. Noted economists like Dr. Andrew Leach have said that they won't share a stage with David Suzuki due to his gross misrepresentation of the facts and now Suzuki's endorsement of violence to achieve his goals. I hope the same can be said of Alberta's NDP and every member of this Chamber.

Sadly, Mr. Speaker, I've heard reports that over the weekend Alberta's NDP Provincial Council delegates voted 85 per cent in favour to express its solidarity, where protesters illegally blockaded the construction of the Coastal GasLink pipeline, and that they also called, shamefully, for the project to be halted.

It has also been reported that one member of the opposition stood in solidarity with the NDP youth wing on this and that another member of the opposition spoke in favour of this motion. I think this would be appalling to every other member of the Chamber if it is true and appalling to the hard-working men and women of this province. That's why, as I said, Mr. Speaker, I intend to move a motion later in this House so that every member has an opportunity to support the hard-working men and women of this province and to condemn the remarks of David Suzuki and show that they support the rule of law inside our country.

Members' Statements

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

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the minister for moving that motion later today against David Suzuki.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Getson: Today I'm pleased to rise in recognition of National Housing Day. Every year on November 22 we raise awareness about the importance of safe, stable, and affordable housing. It's also an opportunity to recognize our outstanding partners providing housing for Albertans in need. This includes housing management bodies, civil society groups, and private companies that deliver programs, build homes, and maintain units. This year National Housing Day comes on the heels of a very important step forward in our work to address the affordable housing needs in Alberta and transform that system.

Earlier this month a colleague of mine, the Minister of Seniors and Housing, announced stronger foundations, Alberta's 10-year strategy to improve and expand affordable housing. Bold and thoughtful, stronger foundations focuses on partnerships and innovations to ensure our housing system is flexible, fair, and inclusive. The strategy will enact changes needed to provide safe, stable, and affordable housing to an additional 25,000 households. That will increase the total number of households served by more than 40 per cent, up to 82,000, Mr. Speaker.

I was pleased to sit on the minister's advisory committee on housing, along with the housing providers and experts in the field, and proud to see the advice from that committee reflected in this

new strategy. As a member of the Assembly whose constituency borders Edmonton, St. Albert, Stony Plain, Spruce Grove, Morinville – everybody likes to sit on our borders, Mr. Speaker – and also includes rural and a number of small communities, I'm pleased to report that the actions to meet the needs of rural areas in our province are prominent in this strategy. No one knows the needs of a community better than the people who reside there. They are invested in that community, in its future, and stronger foundations will give housing providers and communities the power to identify and implement local solutions and local needs. We need to tap into that community of expertise, and we will.

It is indeed a happy National Housing Day with a bold, new, innovative strategy to improve and expand affordable housing in our province. Let's all work together to build a stronger foundation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

United Conservative and New Democratic Parties

Member Irwin: Today I'd like to tell you a tale of two political parties, a tale of parties with far different visions for Alberta, two parties with two very different leaders, and no clearer was this contrast than when you look at just what went on at these parties' gatherings this weekend. Wow.

As the NDP passed policies calling for a ban on conversion therapy and support for GSAs in schools, the UCP rammed through a policy of so-called conscience rights, an outright attack on abortion access and queer and trans health care. As our party passed a resolution to get funds for victims of crime back in the hands of survivors, those who actually need them, the UCP carried on as if their horrific cuts didn't hurt some of our most vulnerable citizens. As the UCP debated merit pay for teachers, a policy which would disproportionately impact poor and racialized students, the NDP passed antiracist policies like strengthening hate crimes legislation. As we talked about support for the environment through protecting parks, recognizing Indigenous sovereignty, and access to clean drinking water, the UCP argued whether climate change was real and voted down any solutions to address it. These are just some examples. Quite frankly, I don't have enough time to tell you more.

1:40

I can also tell you this. In our speech, as our leader talked about building a better Alberta for all, about how we can truly have a province that uplifts everyone and leaves no one behind, the leader of the UCP was left looking behind him wondering which of his caucus members might be next to launch a revolt.

You can tell a lot about one's leadership style by how they articulate their vision. While our leader talked about Albertans and amplified their voices, the leader of the UCP talked about – you guessed it – the NDP.

I talk to a lot of Albertans. They want a government with foresight. They want to hear how we'll do things differently. They want an economy that creates jobs but not at the cost of the environment. They want a leader who puts people first. They want hope. They want compassion. They want critical thinking. I can promise you that you'll get all those things with the NDP, but don't wait for that to happen. Join us. A better province is possible, and it's closer . . .

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

Oil and Gas Pipeline Opposition

Mrs. Frey: Mr. Speaker, British Columbia is experiencing an unprecedented catastrophe. Tragically, most of the roads and railways are cut off from the rest of Canada due to detrimental flooding and horrible mudslides. My thoughts and prayers are with all those

affected, and I'm grateful to those who have volunteered to keep fellow Canadians safe.

Currently B.C. is cut off from the rest of Canada. Places like Vancouver are rationing gas and other fuel to make sure that emergency services and restoration can continue. Right now pipelines are the only way to make sure that these much-needed resources continue to flow as ports are closed and infrastructure is destroyed, but this doesn't seem to matter to radical environmentalist terrorists like David Suzuki. On Saturday he told a group of Extinction Rebellion protesters that pipelines should be, quote, blown up if action isn't taken. To him, that might be a warning, but for me and the constituents of Brooks-Medicine Hat who work in the energy sector, that is a threat, Mr. Speaker.

I know the opposition doesn't seem to care, as the NDP passed a resolution this weekend to stand in solidarity with the illegal blockades of the Coastal GasLink pipeline. Yes. You're right, Mr. Speaker. That's the pipeline that's supported by over 20 First Nations and provided them with intergenerational wealth.

The actions of these protesters are criminal, and it's time that we started treating them that way. There is no universe in which Alberta political parties should be endorsing the explosion of critical infrastructure in another province. This violence threatens lives and puts livelihoods in jeopardy, Mr. Speaker, and the blockading of railways doesn't just slow down commutes; they are quite literally a matter of life and death as just last night these extremists blocked ambulances accessing the hospital in Saanich, B.C. That isn't hyperbole; that is the cold hard facts.

Elected officials have a duty to call out extremism and threats of violence when they rear their ugly heads. The United Conservatives have pledged to stand up to environmental terrorists. Instead of inviting them to our classrooms, maybe it's time those across the aisle did the same.

I'm calling on the NDP caucus to stand up today and denounce the extremist factions of their membership. I'll wait with bated breath, but I have a feeling that I'll be disappointed.

Municipal Funding

Member Ceci: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's municipal leaders want a partner in their provincial government, and what they've gotten is anything but from this government. This UCP government have cut municipal funding, torn up big-city charters despite promising not to, and paid for their failed economic policies by downloading costs onto local leaders, who are then left with no choice but to raise taxes.

They claim to have helped with rural crime, but let's be clear. The funding for additional police is coming from the budgets of cities, towns, and villages, not from the province. And speaking of police, there were audible groans last Friday at the Alberta municipalities convention when this Premier tried to sell his horrible idea to create an Alberta provincial police force to local leaders, who both haven't asked for such a thing and aren't sold that it will do a thing to help them with justice issues in their communities.

This government is no partner to municipalities, Mr. Speaker; Alberta's NDP does view them with respect and will treat them as partners.

I so enjoyed speaking with countless mayors and councillors last week about the commitment from our leader to a new fiscal relationship. We call it being partners in prosperity, and it will be a law tying provincial revenues to municipal revenues. As our leader put it, "Alberta succeeds when we all succeed."

I can't wait to put more ideas forward to support municipalities, to support Alberta families, to protect public health care and public education, and to create new jobs and truly diversify our economy. That's a necessity, not a luxury, Mr. Speaker. Put simply, come 2023,

I can't wait to build Alberta's future with each and every person living in this province.

Thank you, sir.

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

Economic Recovery Plan

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When this provincial government took administration, it recognized the problems that Alberta is facing. Economic support and jobs for Albertans were needed more than ever. That's why an all-encompassing strategy was put forward, including the repeal of a provincial carbon tax, common-sense labour changes, the continuous removal of needless red tape, strengthening and modernizing democracy, economic diversification, and a job-creation tax cut was made, reducing the corporate tax to 8 per cent. These policies are a vital part of the plan to reignite the economy, support job creators, and get Albertans working again. It is focused on shaping Alberta as a prime location for investment, relocation, and expansion.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the plunge of oil prices have put more challenges to our provincial government. Mr. Speaker, we know that progress will not happen overnight, but I know that the provincial government is working day and night for Albertans to prosper and to provide more support to Albertans.

Recently I'm glad to see numerous investments coming to Alberta, proving that these policies in the Alberta recovery plan are working. In the tech sector Amazon Web Services has announced that they will be building their second Canadian hub in the Calgary region. It will create 1,000 jobs and a total \$4.3 billion venture. Mphasis will build its Canadian headquarters in Calgary, creating 1,000 jobs. Infosys has committed to creating 500 jobs; mCloud, about 200 jobs. The innovation hub from RBC will create 300 jobs; Rogers-Shaw, 500 jobs. The other major investments include the expansion of Dow's petrochemical plant, amounting to about \$10 billion, and the Northern Petrochemical Corporation investment of \$2.5 billion.

A recent Conference Board of Canada provincial outlook shows that Alberta will lead the charge on economic growth in 2022. I look forward to seeing more investment in the near future and seeing Alberta to be again the economic engine of this wonderful country.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows has a statement to make.

Kindergarten to Grade 6 Draft Curriculum

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Premier refuses to back down on the draft K to 6 curriculum no matter what teachers, educational experts, and parents say. Of the more than 6,000 teachers and school leaders who participated in evaluating the curriculum, 95 per cent indicated that they believe the draft curriculum fails Alberta students in every grade, jeopardizing their future. And for what? So the Premier can get the elementary students to memorize his ideologies rather than giving them the tools to learn and grow.

Mr. Speaker, I know that the government continues to proclaim how they want our students to be able to compete globally, so I cannot help but wonder: why is the material so outdated and contrary to current research? I know that it might be hard for the government to understand this, given that they'd much rather ignore the contributions of people of colour to this province and blame South Asian communities for COVID spread, but I would like to explain it to them. This curriculum is nothing more than a disturbing attempt to reverse many if not all of the important steps taken to decolonize

education. As educators and Indigenous communities have repeatedly pointed out, it is Eurocentric, it is paternalistic, and it is a very outdated way of understanding an increasingly complex and diverse Alberta.

This curriculum change does not seem to be about Alberta's children at all. If this government cares about its students, they will do what's right: they will go back to the drawing board and actually take the advice given by parents, Indigenous leaders, and, most importantly, teachers. This is not about them, and it's not about whatever ideologies they are trying to push. This is about our children's future.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I might just note that pursuant to the procedural memo that I sent out previous to session, on page 9 it makes note that the use of laptops during the daily Routine is not acceptable with the exception of as a reading device.

Oral Question Period

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

Surgery Wait Times

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, after 72 hours of fake political theatre and pay-to-play applause the Premier needs to come back to reality. There are more than 15,000 Albertans waiting for their cancelled surgeries. Every day this number goes up. That's more and more Albertans waiting in pain. The consequences of this Premier and his entire government's inaction this summer are serious, and they are continuing to grow. This damage to our health care is historical and unprecedented. To the Premier: when will these surgeries be rescheduled? Where is the plan?

1:50

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, surgeries are being rescheduled, and I want to thank everyone at AHS and Covenant Health for helping to begin catching up on the COVID surgical backlog in addition to which the government is proceeding with our commitment for the Alberta surgical initiative, with an additional \$900 million baseline investment in this year's budget, to increase massively the number of surgeries that are performed in Alberta. I know that the hon. Minister of Health will be able to provide an update soon about the state of the surgical backlog from COVID.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've been waiting a while for that update.

Now, meanwhile I've received countless letters from Albertans in heartbreaking circumstances. Bob* farms in northern Alberta. His hernia is so bad right now that he can't run his operation; his surgery was cancelled. Cheryl's* gynecological surgery has been postponed indefinitely, and she is in incredible pain. Jesse's* dad was diagnosed with kidney cancer. His surgery was cancelled, and now they worry it will spread. These Albertans deserve action now. They were promised a plan. They have not gotten the plan. Where is the Premier's plan for fixing his mistakes?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to inform the member in the House that 100 per cent of required cancer surgeries are now being performed within the clinically necessary period of time and that overall surgery capacity is at 76 per cent. As COVID numbers have continued to come down, we'll see that move to 100 per cent over the next two to three weeks, allowing us to then proceed with catching up on non cancer-related surgeries in the system.

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Health minister gave us that information two weeks ago, and it is not answering the questions we have today.

This fourth wave was both the most preventable and also the most damaging to our health care system. Almost a month ago the minister stood in this House and promised to not only report daily on the changing backlog numbers but to present a plan to fix them. Today we have no plan. We hear the numbers going up. To the Premier. Albertans need you to be upfront. How many surgeries have been cancelled? What is the latest number? Where and when will we get the plan?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, I know they pre-script their questions over there. They don't bother trying to listen to the answers. I gave the answer to those questions, that 100 per cent of cancer surgeries are on schedule within the clinical guidelines, and we're at 76 per cent of surgical capacity. We anticipate, based on the decline in new COVID numbers, to be able to move to 100 per cent of surgical capacity within the next two or three weeks and then, of course, catch up on the COVID-related backlog while in 2022 moving forward with the expansion of the Alberta surgical initiative, supported by a \$900 million incremental investment.

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

Ms Notley: Again, that is not the kind of information we were looking for. We were looking for a real plan. Now, meanwhile Albertans do not trust these folks exactly because of answers like that.

Physician Recruitment and Retention in Lethbridge

Ms Notley: In Lethbridge, a city of 100,000 people, not a single family doctor is taking new patients. None. Thirty thousand Albertans with serious conditions are left thumbing through the Yellow Pages or, worse, waiting for their conditions to get so bad they end up in the ER. The stress and anxiety this places on families is extraordinary. To the Premier: on this front what exact action are you taking today to fix the problem, and again could you be specific?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, there are, in fact, more doctors practising in Alberta today than at any time in our history. There are more rural doctors practising now than at any time in our history. There are more nurses working now than was the case under the NDP. We have added \$80 million to the Health budget to support rural physician retention and recruitment. That's for about 700 rural physicians. That averages over \$100,000 per physician. Of course, every province has a challenge, but this government is seeing significant progress, unlike the previous government, which neglected this issue.

Ms Notley: I'd love to see the Premier tell that to the 30,000 people in Lethbridge who just lost their doctor. Now, William Pelech lost his doctor this summer. When he got sick, he had no choice but to wait for an opening for the walk-in clinic. Once he got there, the doctor said, quote, I had pneumonia for several weeks. Melissa Lorne and her family lost their doctor 18 months ago. They've had to go to the ER 20 times. The Premier claims he tore up Alberta's contract with doctors to save money. To the Premier: is this what saving money looks like, no doctor for 30,000 people in the city of Lethbridge?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, once again, there are more physicians working in Alberta now than at any time in our history. The Health budget is higher than at any time in our history. There are more

nurses working in our system now than at any time in our history. From time to time there are local service challenges that we expect AHS to address – that's what we give them \$22 billion to do – but with respect to rural physicians there's an additional \$80 million for retention and recruitment because unlike the NDP, we take that issue very seriously.

Ms Notley: You know, Mr. Speaker, it's this kind of gaslighting of people's real problems which explains why this is the most unpopular . . .

Mr. Jason Nixon: Point of order.

Ms Notley: . . . Premier in the country.

Now, back in September our party asked the Premier for an action plan for physician attraction to be rolled out in 30 days, but instead of asking his Health minister, he dumped the responsibility back onto communities, saying that recruitment depends on local partnerships. Mr. Speaker, this isn't a big ask. Will the Premier direct his minister to develop and release an action plan, another one, on a self-generated crisis for the people of Lethbridge? They have a problem. They'd like you . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I am having some difficulty hearing the question. I will just reiterate that Alberta has the largest number of doctors working within our system at any time in our history. The health care budget under the NDP was \$19 billion. It is now \$22 billion, \$3 billion added in COVID response, \$900 million added through the surgical initiative, and that is for a province that spends more than any other, save one, per capita on health care in the country, that spends more than any other in the OECD in a universally insured system. We'll continue to make those historic investments.

The Speaker: A point of order was noted at 1:55.

The hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

COVID-19 Vaccines for Children

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, on Friday pediatric vaccines were approved, and yesterday they arrived. Meanwhile just before that approval I asked the Premier about our pediatric vaccine plan, and his answer was worrisome. He appeared to suggest that there hadn't been enough time dedicated to vaccine approval while the risk to children from COVID was low. Public education and the Premier's statements are critical for encouraging uptake. To the Premier: does he believe this vaccine is safe and effective for children, and does he encourage parents to get their children immunized? Yes or no?

Mr. Kenney: Yes and yes.

Ms Notley: Well, that's good.

Now the question is – here's what we've known for months: one, pediatric vaccines are coming; two, unvaccinated children age five to 11 drive community transmission; three, the greatest number of new cases are among unvaccinated children; and, four, getting them vaccinated will help reduce cases and increase immunity throughout the whole population. Mr. Speaker, now these vaccines are here, yet we still don't have a rollout plan from this government. Why is this government dragging its feet?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, we did in fact go to in-school clinics for children age 12 to 18 and found very, very little take-up. There were only a few thousand doses administered across the province. There were far more that were cancelled. There were

significant administrative challenges in getting consent forms signed. The advice of health officials is that the much more efficient way of doing this is through rapid flow-through clinics operated by AHS. There will be extended hours on the weekend to maximize convenience for parents, who we encourage to look carefully at the safety and efficacy of these pediatric vaccines.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, that just sounds like a lot of excuses. The fact is that in the past schools have been widely considered to be the best way to both immunize our young population and to reach parents, yet this government is making excuses for not relying on schools. Yeah, it's a little hard. Yes, it's administratively challenging. That's why you should have started on it last summer. Instead, you sat on your hands and you didn't move forward. Why won't you now make sure that we get vaccinations offered in schools and do everything you can to get all of our young people vaccinated?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, Dr. Hinshaw and the Minister of Health will provide more details on Alberta's ambitious program to make available conveniently the pediatric vaccine to those parents who wish to offer it to their children. Once again, we did create a vaccine rollout program within the schools with minuscule take-up. From memory, I think there were only a few thousand, maybe 4,000 or 5,000, parents across the province who used that. We instead want to focus on speed and convenience. It really is unfortunate, though, as ever, that the NDP is trying to use vaccines as a divisive political wedge. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

2:00 United Conservative Party Annual General Meeting

Mr. Dang: There were many serious concerns raised about the government of Alberta using its considerable resources to corral votes and support behind the least trusted Premier in the country prior to the UCP annual general meeting. None were more concerning than the reports of a letter that surfaced from an unknown executive who said that he hoped to turn support at the AGM into political favours from the provincial government. For the record does the Premier or anyone on his staff know about the letter that was written, who wrote it, and have they turned that information . . .

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Mr. Dang: . . . clear evidence of political bribery, over to the RCMP?

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2 o'clock.

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm glad that the member opposite paid attention to the 1,600 grassroots conservatives from across the province who came together with enthusiasm to celebrate the enormous progress of this government having achieved 83 per cent delivery on our platform commitments.

In the meantime the NDP was meeting, Mr. Speaker, to pass a motion supporting illegal roadblocks to stop pipelines. The mask has fallen, and the loony left has taken over the NDP yet again. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Dang: We're concerned about corruption and bribery in the Premier's office. When the Premier's office is up for sale to the highest bidder, it serves no one except the wealthy friends of this government. It is a matter of public policy when people can curry favour by using their wealth and considerable resources to direct votes of what is supposed to be a democratic AGM. We shouldn't

have to raise these matters in the House, but this government has clearly blurred the line between those and their public policy duties to every Albertan. Can the Premier confirm for this House what political favours or government policy commitments were made to delegates or stakeholder groups in exchange for their votes at the AGM?

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:02.

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, it was exciting to have near-record turnout of United Conservatives from across the province to celebrate the progress that this government is making, leading Canada in economic growth and recovery and job creation.

In the meantime the NDP met to pass a resolution, Mr. Speaker, endorsing an illegal road blockade of a pipeline – of a pipeline – that is supported by every one of 20 elected First Nation governments in northern British Columbia. Shame on the NDP for opposing the economic rights of Indigenous people to move their people from poverty to prosperity.

Mr. Dang: The Premier can duck and dodge questions about corruption in his office, but I won't be silent in this House, not when our democracy appears to be for sale. This Premier ran on a grassroots guarantee. He said that members of the UCP would dictate policy. Now we find that not only is that not happening, but there are very serious allegations that the only people directing policy are those who whipped votes this weekend. Premier, for the record stand in this House and tell members of your own party who weren't part of your voting block why their voices don't matter.

The Speaker: I think the hon. Member for Edmonton-South made a concerted effort in his first two questions to find a thread of government policy – in the first two questions – but I find it very difficult to find a thread of any government policy in that third question. The Premier is more than welcome to respond should he choose to do so, but I think we can see what happens when both sides of the House particularly speak about primarily party activities on both sides. Decorum usually suffers.

The hon. Premier, should he choose to respond.

Mr. Kenney: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. We understand why the NDP is agitated. Seeing 1,600 excited, positive, future-focused grassroots conservatives come together is the last thing they want to see. The other thing Albertans don't want to see is a return to office of an antipipeline socialist government that today, just today, has tarnished its antipipeline credentials. Just like they asked Justin Trudeau to kill Northern Gateway, just like they killed KXL, they now want to kill Coastal GasLink and the entire LNG Canada project, which is a lifeline for Alberta workers in the natural gas industry. Shame on them. [interjections]

The Speaker: Case in point.

Coastal GasLink Pipeline Project

Mr. Turton: Mr. Speaker, I don't think it needs saying, but I want to put it on the record. On this side of the House we support our energy industry, and we support the right of Indigenous people to be meaningful partners in the industry. On the other hand, the evidence clearly shows that the NDP holds the opposite position. Just this weekend Alberta NDP delegates overwhelmingly voted to oppose the Coastal GasLink pipeline and the economic prosperity it is bringing to B.C. First Nations. To the Premier: can you remind

the House of the economic benefits that projects like this bring to Indigenous people?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, the rate of employment for Indigenous people in the oil and gas industry is 7 per cent versus a 3 per cent rate of employment across the total Canadian economy, meaning that an Indigenous Canadian is twice as likely to be employed in oil and gas – and in Alberta and B.C. significantly more than that – with average incomes in the pipeline industry of \$144,000 a year. That’s why Coastal GasLink is supported by all 20 elected Indigenous councils in northern British Columbia. Why is the NDP siding with the foreign-funded activists and the non-Indigenous radical left trying to shut down that project and put Indigenous people out of work?

Mr. Turton: Mr. Speaker, given that the NDP claim that their antipipeline motion is in support of Indigenous people but given that this project has wide support from Indigenous people and communities all along its route, to the Premier: can you inform the House about the widespread democratic consensus on Indigenous people supporting this project that the NDP so antidemocratically oppose?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The proposed Coastal GasLink project – excuse me; the approved project will pass through the traditional territories of 20 northern B.C. First Nations. The elected band councils of all 20 have unanimously, unequivocally endorsed the project. Many hundreds of the people working on it are their Indigenous band members. All five of the clans within the Wet’suwet’en territory: their elected council support this. Chris Sankey of the Lax Kw’alaams band says that the majority of the protesters are non-Indigenous, foreign funded, and use GoFundMe accounts to raise millions. Why is the NDP . . .

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

Mr. Turton: Mr. Speaker, given that in declaring their opposition to this important project, the NDP are signalling their support for radical activists that are illegally blockading the pipeline and given that many of these protesters are outsiders and many of them non-Indigenous and given that this illegal blockade is hurting the Indigenous people that it employs, to the Premier: can you make it clear for NDP members the unlawful nature of the antidemocratic, antiprosperty activism that they are supporting?

The Speaker: I feel like the same caution may be able to be made to the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain about threading a single little piece of government policy into that question. But, as I did previously, if the Premier would like to respond, he’s more than welcome to do so.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I think I know why the hon. member feels so strongly about this. He’s a former union tradesman. He knows so many people who have been able to put food on the table for their families, including Indigenous people, because of projects like this. He’s absolutely right. This isn’t some kind of a paper tiger or some kind of a normal legal protest. What the NDP has just formally endorsed is a law-breaking protest to try to throw the RCMP from enforcing legal court orders. Why is the NDP endorsing law breaking to kill Indigenous jobs? Shame on them. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Rural Bus Service

Mr. Dach: Mr. Speaker, we’re facing a crisis in rural Alberta. When Greyhound pulled out, Cold Shot stepped up to the plate to provide essential bus service across northern Alberta, a made-in-Alberta success story. They were finally making a profit until the pandemic hit, but they kept going, running their fleet at half-capacity, because if you don’t have access to a car, it’s the only way for people to get to medical appointments. Cold Shot cares about Albertans. To the Minister of Transportation. Cold Shot is close to going broke. Why won’t this government step up, help them out, and save rural bus access across rural Alberta for those most in need?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, we know that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant economic impact on businesses in Alberta and around the world. I do sympathize with the thousands of Albertan businesses that are hanging on by a thread. Some of them have had to close their doors, but the good news is that things are turning around. I’d be pleased to meet with Cold Shot to discuss the provincial supports that may be available to them in addition to the two grants that they have already received from the government of Alberta.

Mr. Dach: Sympathy doesn’t keep buses on the road, Mr. Speaker.

Now, given that buses are a lifeline for seniors and those with lower income and given that rural busing is a crucial piece of the rural economy as an essential small-freight carrier as well and given that no one can run a business at a loss indefinitely, which is why the B.C. government stepped up to provide Cold Shot with funding for their Dawson Creek and Fort St. John route to Grande Prairie, to the minister: can this government explain why the B.C. government is stepping up to support Alberta-based carriers while this government is leaving them out in the cold?

2:10

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, Alberta’s government has provided billions of dollars in supports to Alberta’s job creators since the start of the pandemic. Along with receiving SMERG money, I’m pleased to hear that Cold Shot was able to take advantage of federal government programs estimated at \$1.3 million. Alberta’s government also directed companies to various federal and provincial supports, including deferring the collection of corporate tax and education property tax for businesses, and many more.

Mr. Dach: Given that rural bus carriers like Cold Shot provide an essential service across rural Alberta and given that the B.C. government stepped up to help them survive this gruelling pandemic despite Cold Shot being an Alberta-based company and given that the federal government and western economic development also stepped up because they know how critical it is to keep our transportation networks open and our supply chain working, to the Minister of Transportation: if Alberta-based Cold Shot is worthy of support from the government of B.C. and the government of Canada, what will it possibly take for their own government to show them some respect and help them out before they go bankrupt?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, it’s obvious that different jurisdictions have different priorities. Certainly, what’s happening in B.C. right now underscores that their priorities are very, very different from what’s happening here in Alberta. I do want to thank all Albertans for rising to the occasion, and I am also happy to speak with Cold Shot to discuss the situation that they’re in and point them in the right direction to make sure that they have more access to available supports. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Affordable Housing

Ms Sigurdson: Today is National Housing Day, which serves as a reminder to all of us in this Chamber of our duty to ensure every Albertan has a safe and affordable place to call home. While the UCP has been developing plans to sell affordable housing, homelessness in Edmonton has doubled. Poverty has increased drastically across the province under the UCP. If the minister is still confident in her plan, will she bring her vision on housing directly to the voters and delay proclamation on this bill until after the next provincial election?

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

Ms Pon: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. Yes, it's a happy National Housing Day. It's an important day. It's an important day for our government to make sure that we provide enough affordable housing to the people on the wait-list, the over 24,000 people on the wait-list, which the NDP failed to do. We will continue to work on our Bill 78, which is a great plan, a very comprehensive plan to build more housing: 25,000 in additional housing for Albertans.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that I wrote to the minister today with issues that I have heard directly from Albertans seeking affordable housing, municipal leaders, and housing providers outlining what changes the minister should make to Bill 78 and given that the minister has told Albertans not to worry because any profits from the sale of housing would be invested for affordable housing – yet the legislation is silent on this – for the sake of honesty and accountability, will the minister commit today, on National Housing Day, to putting a legislative requirement in the bill that the profits gained from selling housing must be used for affordable housing?

Ms Pon: Well, Mr. Speaker, I do understand, although the members opposite don't see it, that all of our commitments are shown here in Stronger Foundations in section 5.2 and 5.7, too, to indicate that from what we sell, the small portion, that underused or unused property, all the proceeds will be reinvested in affordable housing. Why make it redundant? We promise that we are going to continue our Bill 78 and benefit Albertans.

The Speaker: I'm not entirely sure what the minister was holding up, but if it's not a prop, it ought to be tabled.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that last week at Public Accounts the minister's department could not answer questions about how the demand for affordable housing has increased because of people losing income support funding, including thousands who have lost the additional shelter benefit, and given that the UCP's initial cuts to affordable housing and the decision to deindex AISH and other supports have made it harder for vulnerable Albertans to remain in their homes, does the Seniors and Housing minister know the impact of her government's decisions? Why does she think that a floor mat in a shelter is better than an affordable housing unit?

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

Ms Pon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite are all stuck in their outdated ideological ways. The members opposite had an opportunity to improve the affordable housing sector. In their four years in government they did nothing. The wait-lists increased by 65 per cent in their four years. They failed Albertans. This government: we have a comprehensive affordable housing

strategy that will work for all Albertans and make a meaningful impact on the housing wait-lists, increased by 65 per cent.

United Conservative Party

Mr. Loewen: This government is facing very serious criminal allegations about using the weight of the Premier's office to coerce businesses seeking a favourable relationship with the government into attending the UCP AGM. The leaked e-mail alleges that instead of focusing on government business, senior staff in the Premier's office encouraged businesses to bolster AGM attendance in exchange for, quote, meaningful dialogues with cabinet. To the Minister of Justice: will you commit to Albertans that these allegations will be investigated without interference?

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I have no idea or detail of what the member is talking about. Let me assure this House that as Justice minister I am absolutely committed to making sure that all Albertans live within the ambit of our laws. I can also assure that where criminalities are found, law enforcement is well equipped to deal with matters of that particular nature. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Loewen: Given that this government doesn't seem to understand the divide between the appropriate use of taxpayer-funded government resources and the use of government resources to gain a political advantage and given that just this last Thursday the Minister of Justice used his questionably necessary tour of a northern Alberta college and an official meeting with the Lac La Biche council to campaign with a UCP nomination candidate and given that Albertans are now depending on the Minister of Justice to allow an uninhibited investigation into the activities of this government, to the Minister of Justice: how can Albertans trust you to understand the difference between government and party business?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. Again, I can assure this House that when I go out there to help Conservative candidates across our province, it is done on my own personal time. To be transparent, I do have a friend who is seeking the nomination of my party, and I went out there on my time to help that particular candidate, and I think that is the right thing to do on my personal time.

Mr. Loewen: Given that in August 2017 as a UCP leadership candidate the Premier announced his government would conduct government business by following his grassroots guarantee and given that the Premier said that we must develop policy in the same way that we created the united party, democratically with the grassroots members in charge, and given that last week the Chief Electoral Officer received two complaints concerning PAC money being used to bring in two-minute Tories to save the Premier's job, to the Premier: did you and your enablers break Alberta's election law by profiting off the UCP AGM when you knew full well PAC money was being used to sponsor attendance?

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Mr. Madu: You know, Mr. Speaker, as Justice minister I will caution all of us, on both sides of the aisle, to ensure that we don't make broad allegations that have no substantive basis. I have not come across and neither am I party to any violation of our electoral laws, including that of the Election Finances and Contributions

Disclosure Act. Again, a caution to all of us to not embark on broad accusations without a justifiable basis.

2:20 Infrastructure Accountability Act

Mr. Dang: Over the past few weeks I've been consulting with Albertans on this government's infrastructure agenda, and municipalities are concerned. This government has tabled a bill that is legislating the criteria to evaluate and prioritize infrastructure projects, but this government isn't listening to Albertans. They consulted, and they heard loud and clear that the consideration of regional and municipal plans must be a criteria when the government prioritizes projects, but that's not in the legislation. To the Minister of Infrastructure: why would this government consult, publish the findings, and then completely ignore the results? It's a slap in the face to municipalities.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, what is a slap in the face to municipalities is blowing up the pipelines which will fund projects like the municipalities are asking for. I'm going to ask them: why do you want to stand with people who want to blow up pipelines which generate revenue to pay for infrastructure projects across the province? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

My apologies to the House. I did fail to note that the Deputy Government House Leader raised a point of order at 2:19.

Mr. Dang: Given that it seems the minister is not interested in listening to Albertans and given that all Albertans and the government in particular should be committed to Indigenous reconciliation and given that this government is legislating the exclusive criteria that it will use to evaluate infrastructure projects, meaning that if it's not a legislated criteria, it can't be considered, and given that infrastructure is key to reconciliation, as we saw with the previous government's successful initiative to bring water to reserves, to the Minister of Indigenous Relations: is this government really okay with legally excluding Indigenous reconciliation as a criteria? How does that advance reconciliation?

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

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to reconciliation, that's what this province is all about. There are a lot of photo ops going on on that side of the House but a lot of action over here. We've got water projects going on right now in a couple of communities. We're working on them and moving forward with helping our Indigenous people get fresh water to their communities. I'm not sure what they're really talking about there. Just a lot of photo ops, and I don't really see a lot of action.

Mr. Dang: Given that that minister clearly doesn't understand the importance of infrastructure in reconciliation and given that both this government and the previous one averaged over \$7 billion in infrastructure spending annually and given that this government is proposing to create a 20-year strategic infrastructure plan worth over \$140 billion that will take us into the 2040s and given that this government is legislating, again, the exclusive criteria that it will use to evaluate infrastructure projects, meaning that if it's not on the list, it can't be considered, and given that we all must take climate change seriously, to the environment minister: why is the government legally excluding emissions reductions as even one of those factors?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, we're proud of Alberta's record when it comes to protecting the environment. We have a world-class industry inside this province who has worked tirelessly for decades, in fact has done significantly more than any other jurisdiction in the world and was the first one to do it, and what do you get with the Official Opposition? They just want to support people that want to blow up the infrastructure that the energy industry has put inside this province. They can't run and hide from what their party has done. Is that member going to finally stand up in this Chamber and condemn calls for violence when it comes to pipelines in our province? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Wood Buffalo Indigenous Communities' Economic Development and Voting Access

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I had the opportunity to travel and meet with Indigenous communities in Wood Buffalo to hear their concerns. It's clear that this government has failed to listen to these communities and address the issues they have raised. These communities are looking for the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation to change so that it can fund business feasibility studies to grow local economies. Will the Minister of Indigenous Relations make this change and allow for the funding of business feasibility studies, or does he think the Premier should have more of a say on their local economy than they do?

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

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. When we talk about reconciliation, the Indigenous Opportunities Corporation is a prime example of that. Some of the projects that we've rolled out: a \$1.5 billion energy production plant in Edson, 1,500 jobs. They're looking for 1,500 people out there to work right now, good-paying jobs. That's one example. You know who's working out there? I was out there this summer. Boots on the ground, over 300 Indigenous people working out there. One young girl came up to me. She was so proud. She was training to be an electrician.

Mr. Feehan: Given that this government likes to talk a big game about how they support democracy even though they failed to provide on-reserve polling locations for the municipal, Senate, and referendum voting only last month and given that being able to vote in the communities that you live in is a basic right that should be afforded to all Albertans and given that there will be a by-election in Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche, can the Minister of Indigenous Relations assure First Nations communities that they will be able to vote on-reserve in that by-election, or do they need to set up a Premier-friendly PAC before this government cares about their votes?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is, unfortunately, not well informed. During the municipal election those First Nations that welcomed having a polling station had an opportunity to do so. When that was not the case, the neighbouring municipality – we looked for one to provide that. When we couldn't get that done, every single Indigenous person was offered an opportunity for a mail-in ballot. We offered an opportunity for every single Indigenous person to vote in the past, and we will do so in the future because we care about what Indigenous people think.

Mr. Feehan: Given that the Fort McMurray Métis and Fort McMurray First Nations are looking to expand training, skills development, and other things and have been looking for the provincial government to assist with funding and capital partnerships and given that, instead, this government has failed to adequately fund it, even has slashed successful skills training programs, and abandoned Indigenous communities – these communities don't see this minister as a real partner – will he commit to joining me on my next trip up to Wood Buffalo so he can explain why his government refuses to take real action and make real investments to partner with them?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, none of that is true. We have many different programs that are specifically targeted for our Indigenous communities as well as the general programming. We will continue to have that programming and make sure it's available to our Indigenous people so they can continue to get the skills training, upskilling, reskilling to be able to have the employment opportunities that they deserve so they can be included and part of building infrastructure in this province rather than blowing it up. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Tourism in Lesser Slave Lake

Mr. Rehn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we are on this strong path to recovery – our economy is growing and jobs are being created – I've noticed an increase in tourism, particularly in our provincial parks. Lesser Slave Lake provincial park is a piece of God's country; however, surrounding communities agree that it's hard to increase tourism due to its underdeveloped state. To the Minister of Environment and Parks: are there plans to further develop this beautiful provincial park?

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

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for advocating for his constituents and that important provincial park inside his riding so well. I was happy just a few months ago to visit, with the hon. the Minister of Finance, with the town of Slave Lake, and one of the things we talked about was the provincial park and moving forward with a partnership program despite the fact that the NDP speak against every partnership inside the province. We heard Slave Lake loud and clear, and we are excited to partner with them on managing the infrastructure of Lesser Slave Lake provincial park. I just met with them the other day at AUMA. I'm excited to report to the member and to this Chamber that the agreement to do that is well on its way to being completed.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Rehn: Thank you. Given that a great number of Indigenous communities in Lesser Slave Lake would benefit from increased tourism and given that these communities are experiencing an increase in jobs and investment and that this growth will breathe more life into tourism opportunities for the Indigenous communities as well, to the Minister of Indigenous Relations: what kind of supports are in place to help these Indigenous communities increase opportunities and promote tourism as demand grows?

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

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. When you talk of opportunities, I think this is one of our

greatest opportunities for tourism, with Indigenous people. There have been studies showing that 1 in 4 people coming to Alberta want to have an Indigenous experience as part of their stay here. There are so many great things they can see already from Métis Crossing to the Blackfoot Crossing, Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump. We want to expand that so that other areas can benefit as well, and the Slave Lake area is a prime opportunity with the pristine country and the lakes up there. There are so many opportunities to expand our tourism, and I'm looking forward to meeting with the Indigenous Tourism association this week and speaking there.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rehn: Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the potential for tourism around Alberta's ocean, Lesser Slave Lake, is as vast as its waters, it's sad to see our park, in this underdeveloped state, missing out on opportunities to be had. Given that the town of Slave Lake has allocated its own resources to the park to better develop it to attract more tourism to our area, to the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation: how can the ministry work with the surrounding communities to help improve tourism in our region?

2:30

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, nothing sparks more debate in this House than when we talk about God's country, and there's a little bit of a slice of God's country out there in Slave Lake. One thing I want to also note is Travel Alberta: we've put an additional \$20 million into that Crown corporation to heighten the experience of people that come to this province. We're investing in shovel-ready projects as well to heighten the tourism experience across Alberta. We'd love to partner with the Slave Lake area and put them into contact with Travel Alberta for those new initiatives.

Sexual Violence on Postsecondary Campuses

Member Irwin: Last year the Council of Alberta University Students, CAUS, released recommendations for preventing sexual violence and supporting sexual violence survivors on postsecondary campuses across our province. The report found that sexual violence is increasingly prevalent on campus, and it offered concrete policy and funding asks of this government. Since then CAUS and the Alberta Students' Executive Council and countless other students have spoken out about the need to address sexual violence on campus. However, they've seen no action on this file from the Minister of Advanced Education. Will he now finally commit to adopting the recommendations? When can students expect to see meaningful change?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Status of Women.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for the question. Actually, the CAUS students working on gender-based violence: they and I met this past recent week. The Minister of Advanced Education and I met this past week. I've met with ASEC as well. This is an important issue, and we will have announcements coming very shortly. This is a strategy that is being actively worked on, and I will not stop until it's done.

Member Irwin: Given that one of the main asks is funding for training and prevention of sexual violence, yet this government has not included any funding – in fact, they've cut the Advanced Education budget by over 22 per cent and cut thousands of jobs in postsecondary – and given that students at the U of A are urging their institution to address sexual violence and better support survivors,

issues which could be addressed by leadership from the province, and that this government has stated on the record that they will do more to address sexual violence, to the Minister of Advanced Education: how can students believe that you will meaningfully address sexual violence when all they've received are funding cuts and broken promises?

Ms Issik: Mr. Speaker, as I said, actually, with the students that I met with in the past week and also with the minister, one of the most important things to address sexual violence on campuses is to be able to address the culture, the culture that leads to a conversation that's going on today, that was exactly the same as what went on when I was in university. That's going to change. We are working on meaningful strategy, and it will come with good programs that will actually change the channel on this.

Member Irwin: Given that, again, countless student representatives have met with this Minister of Advanced Education and have been clear in their asks – they're asking for funding – and given that students deserve to be safe in their studies yet this government has done nothing to act on making campuses for all, this province has an opportunity to show that they're a leader not just in words but in actions. Again, back to the Minister of Advanced Education. Students are listening. They want to know from you today: will you commit to meaningful action on addressing sexual violence on campus?

Ms Issik: Mr. Speaker, as I said, sexual violence on campus is a serious issue. We take it seriously. We're working on a plan in conjunction with students. Students will play an incredibly important part of building this strategy. It will be a meaningful strategy that will actually change the channel on the culture that leads to sexual violence on campuses.

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

Agricultural Concerns

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This year's drought has caused one of the hardest seasons Alberta farmers have ever faced. The UCP failed to prepare, and when they did act, it was a little too late. Many farmers have not received their claims yet and are questioning if they can remain in agriculture. The previous minister said that he believed that all claims could be settled by the end of November. To the current minister: will this deadline be met, and what is being done to ensure that Albertans are not being forced to leave farming?

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. She's not wrong. It's been a heck of a year for Alberta's farmers and ranchers, and they are relying on the programs available to them through AFSC that are run in conjunction with the federal government in a big way this year. We're looking at a range of indemnity that at the low end will probably exceed anything we've seen in our past. We're proud to continue to work with them. Our AFSC has done a commendable job of flexing up their number of inspectors. The postharvest production reports were in on November 15. We'll know more in the coming . . .

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

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm assuming, from what the minister just said, that the deadline will not be met.

Given that the floods in B.C. have caused highways and rail lines to be cut off, farmers are concerned about the ability to get their products to market. Given that the UCP's preparations previously for challenges of drought were late and inadequate, I hope the minister is doing more to prepare to support farmers through this new challenge. Given that when I asked about this last week, the answer was not sufficient, to the minister: what is this government going to do to ensure that Albertans are prepared for sustained supply chain disruptions? Please be specific.

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks again for the question. Once again, the hon. member is not wrong. We're seeing some great supply chain disruptions with what's going on with British Columbia. We've been in contact over the weekend with the ag department in British Columbia. They've thanked us for being proactive in doing anything we can to help. There are issues being caused in both directions. The member asked about timeliness in our response to these. I would just like to reiterate that this is a joint effort with the federal government. We cannot – we cannot – unilaterally change this programming, or we will not get the funds next year.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this year's adversity significantly impacts the mental health of producers and that rates of mental health illness are higher in agriculture than in any other industry in Alberta and Canada and given that in August I called on the UCP to implement a 24/7 mental health crisis line specifically for agriculture, which is a proposal that actually is previously endorsed by the rural municipalities association, what is this minister going to do to ensure that farmers have the mental health supports they need and really support the implementation of a 24/7 helpline?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the question. The first week I was sworn in, we had our federal-provincial-territorial meetings with the federal minister and the ag ministers from every province and territory. I can assure the hon. member that mental health in the agriculture community was one of the main segments that was discussed over these three days. It is a major issue. We need to do more. Part of it is, you know, the great distances in rural Alberta, where these people live in the communities that are closest to them. We'll continue to work for that, but thank you for the question.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

Rural Economic Development Engagement

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past few years Alberta has been hit hard, but our government's policies are helping to kick-start the largest economic recovery for any province in Canada. Alberta's recovery plan will benefit every corner of our province. We know that rural communities play a critical role in our province, contributing to the strength and prosperity of Alberta's economy. To the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development: what steps are you taking to ensure that common-sense ideas from rural Albertans are being heard?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Ensuring that Alberta's recovery plan benefits all regions of our province is a priority for this government, and we can't do that without the common-sense ideas and feedback from rural Alberta. That's why we launched Alberta's rural engagement survey. That's why I'm personally participating in 20 sessions with over 900 invited community leaders. The results of the survey and engagement will continue to play an important role in guiding our plan and discussing next steps.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that reply. Given that the government is currently doing a rural engagement tour with several communities throughout the province to better understand the challenges and opportunities facing economic development across rural Alberta and given that this tour will comprise 20 sessions with more than 900 industry and community leaders, can the minister provide an update on his rural engagement tour and what kind of feedback he is receiving from Albertans thus far?

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a reminder that our public engagement survey will run until December 18.

Some common themes that we've heard have been around child care, rural broadband, our agrifood sector specifically. That's why I'm thrilled at some of the steps that have been taken over the weeks and months: the Minister of Children's Services' \$3.8 billion plan that was announced last week; the \$150 million commitment by the Minister of Service Alberta to really, in the first substantial way in decades, build up that rural connectivity.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta's government is committed to listening to Albertans to ensure an economic recovery that benefits every corner of our province and given that not all rural Albertans are able to participate in the minister's rural engagement sessions and given the importance of hearing ideas from all residents who wish to contribute, again to the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development: what can my constituents do to participate in this consultation process, and when can we expect the complete feedback to be available?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you. First, I'd like to thank the hon. member for his dedication to addressing the concerns of rural Albertans, particularly those from Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock. Our survey and consultation process remain active, and our department is continuing to compile results and feedback we're receiving from rural Albertans. This is just the first stage of our rural engagement plan. We'll take what we have heard to stakeholders, hopefully in person, with an update on the themes that have emerged, and work with them on a plan for next steps.

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

Members' Statements

(continued)

Health Care Workers

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, today I rise to reflect upon and recognize the selfless sacrifices of so many during the past year and a half as we continue to navigate through the COVID-19 pandemic. Our province has gone through some unprecedented challenges, and there have been many for all members of this House and for all throughout Alberta. We have seen economic uncertainty for families and businesses. Many of us have tragically known or lost a loved one, and we're struggling with the heightened anxiety, mental health issues, suicide, and depression experienced by many.

Mr. Speaker, despite all of the struggles that Albertans have dealt with throughout this pandemic, one group has never wavered, never shied away from supporting us all. With the struggles that Albertans from north to south have faced, there has been one group that has never shied away from supporting Albertans as we battle through this pandemic. Yes, I'm talking about Alberta's doctors, nurses, medical technicians, midwives, and all of our other health care workers who have been with us since the beginning of this pandemic, who stood in the face of an invisible enemy, and who stepped up when we needed them most.

Mr. Speaker, even before vaccines were available and even before we knew what we know now, our health care workers put themselves between COVID-19 and affected Albertans. These heroes put themselves in the midst of danger to ensure that we all had access to our world-class health care system. I want to emphasize that our essential health care workers did this without the safety of a vaccine, without knowing the implications of what they were facing, and showed their vigilance around the clock as they delivered care and comfort to our vulnerable populations.

Mr. Speaker, despite the unknown, these health care workers took steps during the early portion of this battle that kept them, their families, and the most vulnerable populations safe. Everyone in this House and everyone across Alberta has learned that our health care workers are a vital part of our health care system.

Thank you.

National Child Day

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, Saturday was National Child Day, to mark Canada's ratification of the UN convention on the rights of a child. The theme this year is the right of children to survive and thrive, but to be honest, I think we can and must do so much more than that. These rights can seem so obvious, but we must reflect on what this means right now and how we are supporting this for all Alberta children, including Indigenous children.

Children in Alberta have carried incredible responsibility over the last 18 months, but we cannot keep leaning on their resiliency as an excuse to not do more. Not all children have the luxury of resilience, and it is incumbent that we ensure all children have full support and opportunity to realize their potential. We can do this by ensuring children have access to mental health supports when and where they need them. We can ensure that they have quick and easy access to safe and life-saving vaccines.

Children have a right to have their bodies and spirits nourished, to be respected, to be heard, to be engaged in the issues that affect them, and to lead in their own growth and development. We can do this by making sure that they know that no matter who they are, who they become, or who they love, they are loved, valued, heard, accepted, and supported.

Children have the right to be connected to their culture, language, and traditions. We can ensure this through a curriculum where they see themselves, their history, and their value reflected.

Children have the right to thrive by ensuring that all children have access to quality early learning in their critical early years, which is why I'm so proud to be a member of a party that has always advocated for universal child care.

Children have the right to be safe and part of a family, which is why every member of this Assembly should be concerned about the alarming increases in the number of Indigenous children in care and, even more devastatingly, the rise in the number of deaths of children in care.

Today, while we celebrate each individual child in all their beautiful diversity, I call on all members of this Assembly to commit again to ensuring that Alberta's children are at the heart and forefront of all the work we do.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South has a statement to make.

Federal-provincial Relations

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise not in anger but to raise a voice of warning. Media describes Justin Trudeau as Canada's first NDP Prime Minister, but he is also Canada's first separatist Prime Minister, demonstrating that he will not hesitate to attack the livelihoods of Alberta individuals and families to further his political ambitions for power. Canada is spending itself into oblivion, threatening to take Alberta down with it, adopting policies of economic self-destruction. What Canada was is less important than what Canada is and what it is becoming.

Mr. Speaker, socialism is an enemy of self-reliance. When legal plunder displaces work as a ruling principle, a sustainable society is lost. Unprincipled, hostile partners have no moral authority to claim additional loyalty. In the real world loyalty is not conferred; it is earned.

Our requirement for fairness is not founded on anger. It is founded on principle. How is leverage increased when appealing for fairness from unprincipled partners? Mr. Speaker, here's a true principle. The less Alberta needs Ottawa, the more leverage Alberta has. It is an inverse relationship.

The fair Alberta strategy was at our AGM, is hosting town halls throughout Alberta. Mine is tonight. Great self-reliance is the right way to free Alberta from hostile interference and insulate our children from a looming fiscal train wreck. We can trust in the truth, the peace of acting for ourselves, seeking to provide for our families and others.

The Speaker: Hon. members, prior to proceeding to the remainder of the daily Routine, I'm sure that all members will join me in congratulating Speaker Anthony Rota, who was recently re-elected as the Speaker of the House of Commons in Ottawa. I'm sure you're all just as excited as I am.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of Government Motion 104, which will be sponsored by myself.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly condemn David Suzuki's comments on pipelines as reported by the *National Post*, second, that the Legislative Assembly condemn any comments

made calling for the intentional destruction of energy infrastructure, and third, that the Assembly unequivocally condemn incitements of violence and eco terrorism.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table five copies of a letter from the School Age Care Directors Association of Alberta, dated November 17, 2021, addressed to the Minister of Children's Services and the Premier, asking for a meeting to address the issue that out of school care has been excluded from the recent federal child care announcements, which has direct impacts on providers and on parents.

The Speaker: Are there other tablings? The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat has a tabling.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two. Last week one of Alberta's dailies put out very, very clearly that the Premier has plans to interfere in the nominations of sitting MLAs.

Mr. Speaker, another day, another paper, another journalist, the same premise: the Premier plans to interfere with the nominations of sitting MLAs. I table both.

2:50

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table an article, too, from November 18, 2021, by Don Braid. This article alleges that the Premier's staff are using the weight of the Premier's office to influence attendance, and I quote from it: the province is a democracy, but it's not being exhibited at this AGM.

Thank you.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of hon. Mr. Orr, Minister of Culture, pursuant to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts Act the Alberta Foundation for the Arts 2020-21 annual report.

On behalf of hon. Mr. Shandro, Minister of Labour and Immigration, pursuant to the Chartered Professional Accountants Act the Chartered Professional Accountants Alberta annual report 2020-21; pursuant to the Agrology Profession Act the Alberta Institute of Agrologists annual report 2020; pursuant to the Engineering and Geoscience Professions Act the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Alberta 2020 annual report.

On behalf of hon. Mr. McIver, Minister of Municipal Affairs, pursuant to the Government Organization Act the Alberta Elevating Devices and Amusement Rides Safety Association annual report 2020-21.

The Speaker: At 1:55 the Deputy Government House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Schow: Why, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise in this Chamber for what I think is one of my favourite parts of the

day, holding the opposition to account and doing points of order. This point of order was called at 1:55, when the hon. Leader of the Opposition was posing her question to the hon. Premier, at which point that member began her question by saying: gaslighting of people's real problems which explains why this is one of the most unpopular Premiers in the country. I rise on this point of order of 23(h), (i) and (j). It certainly imputes false motives, it certainly makes allegations against another member, and the language, I would find, is abusive or insulting by nature, likely to create disorder. I believe this is a point of order, and I encourage that member to apologize and withdraw and cease to use such further disruptive language.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On this point of order, on behalf of the member in question I would apologize and withdraw.

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

At approximately 2:00, 2:02 and 2:03 the Deputy Government House Leader rose on points of order.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If I may combine the second two points of order, but the first one, at 2:00, was on a separate matter, if it pleases the chair.

The Speaker: The chair is pleased.

Point of Order Hypothetical Questions

Mr. Schow: Certainly. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Edmonton-South, at the point of the first question, said, "For the record, does the Premier or anyone on his staff know about the letter that was written, who wrote it, and have they turned that information . . . clear evidence of political bribery, over to the RCMP?" If I refer to this large green book I have on my desk, which is *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, 3rd edition, on page 509 it says with regard to questions in question period that the precedents indicate that a question should not be a statement, represent an argument or be an opinion and, more so, be hypothetical. The letter this individual, the member opposite, was referring to was from an unknown executive. That name was not brought to this Chamber. This is a clearly hypothetical situation. It is unparliamentary in practice to bring up hypothetical situations and questions, and I do believe that this is a point of order rather than a legitimate question for this time.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member was not asking about a hypothetical. The member was asking about an anonymous letter that has been reported on in the media that has evidence, potentially, of the government of Alberta using resources for partisan activities, with potential implications of political favours being garnered from a provincial government. I feel strongly that this is a legitimate question for the Official Opposition to be asking as it is our role to hold the government accountable for its actions. I would suggest to you that that is not a point of order but a legitimate question asked during question period.

The Speaker: This is a matter of debate. It's not a point of order. On the third and fourth points of order.

Point of Order Referring to Party Matters

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This one is also referring back to *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, and you yourself had made a point of raising this concern about addressing party matters in questions during question period. This is not the first time the members opposite have brought up party matters not related to government policy in this Chamber during question period. It is certainly not a typical practice, nor should it be accepted. If we do refer back to this big green book, the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, on page 510 it says that questions should not be concerning internal party matters, party or candidate or election expenses. I believe that question 2 and specifically question 3 were both related to party matters. I believe this is a point of order and ask that you rule as such.

The Speaker: I provided comment on this matter during Oral Question Period, and I have provided some caution in the past. I provided caution to the hon. member with respect to tying these issues of, perhaps, party matters with some thread of relevance to government policy. I immediately followed that with a question from members of the government, who also struggled with the same principle, so perhaps we'll call this a draw for the time being. But this is a matter that continues to rise, and as noted during Oral Question Period today, almost exclusively when these matters are raised, the decorum is decreased. I encourage members to govern themselves accordingly. I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

The Deputy Government House Leader called one additional point of order.

Point of Order Referring to Party Matters

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on a point of order; 2:19, I believe, was the time that you mentioned in your remarks. At the time the Member for Central Peace-Notley was speaking to the hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General. Again, party matters seem to be the matters of the day in this time. I don't have the benefit of the Blues, but I have what I believe to be very close to what the *Hansard* record would show. It says: to the Premier, did you or your enablers break Alberta election laws by profiteering off the UCP AGM when you knew money was being used to sponsor attendance? This has nothing to do, not even tangentially related, with government policy but, rather, about attendance at our AGM this past weekend, something I attended myself and had an absolute blast. While we were talking about Alberta policy, the opposition was talking about blowing up pipelines. I think this is a point of order. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The Member for Central Peace-Notley has the call.

Mr. Loewen: Yeah. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, this is definitely a matter of debate. I don't know if you have the Blues, but I could read from my question here: the Premier announced his government would conduct government business by following his grassroots guarantee. Then I did ask: did you and your enablers break Alberta's election law by profiting off the UCP AGM?

Now, clearly, the Chief Electoral Officer is of the opinion that if there is a profit made off the AGM, then of course that is obviously something that would concern him, about money from PACs paying for attendance to the AGM. I do want to remind this House that we do have an election financing bill before the House, and

obviously when we are talking about election financing, this would fall under that because we have the issue of money coming in to influence elections and influencing political parties. I would suggest that this is not a point of order.

You know, I think last week the deputy House leader suggested that others may need to develop a thicker skin, and I'd probably suggest that he could with the extra \$12,000 he gets a year for his position.

The Speaker: Okay.

Mr. Loewen: I just have one more point I'd like to add, and it's relevant. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Should you suggest that I apologize for this, what I want to ask is: is it government policy to break election laws, or is it current practice? That's the question that maybe I should have asked.

The Speaker: I appreciate the interventions. I am prepared to rule. I do have the benefit of the Blues, and the question that the Member for Central Peace-Notley asked is: "Did you and your enablers break . . . election law[s]?" It seems to me that while the question does include contents that may be out of order with respect to annual general meetings and other political activities, the question that the member posed was with respect to Alberta election laws.

Now, I would provide some caution to the member because a point could be made that he was making an accusation that the Premier or others were breaking election laws, and of course making an accusation in the Chamber would be unparliamentary.

I don't consider this a point of order but a matter of debate although I encourage the member to choose his words wisely with respect to questions inside the Chamber and for Oral Question Period. I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

We are at Orders du jour.

3:00

Orders of the Day

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

Bill 219

Workers' Compensation (Expanding Presumptive Coverage) Amendment Act, 2021

[Adjourned debate October 25: Mr. Williams]

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

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise to Bill 219 on concurrence. This was a bill that I had introduced in the House and had hoped that we would be at a stage now where we'd be moving through our stages, but of course given the new parameters that have been put in place, now we have to go through a concurrence process first.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Now, in regard to the workers' compensation amendment act this is something where it should have just been done by now, to be honest. There has been opportunity, I would say, well, since COVID started, to really have a good look at our labour relations legislation, to look at how we're supporting workers in Alberta, and to make sure that they have access to the benefits and supports that they need in relation to posttraumatic stress disorder and, obviously, whether or not they would contract COVID.

Now, of course, what we've seen, though, over the last year and a half is that this government takes its time when it comes to trying

to provide any type of support for working people in this province. The issue with that, of course, is that we've seen a delay in payments for income bump-ups. We've seen a delay in supporting businesses and being able to put supports in place to keep their workers safe. We've seen delay after delay after delay after delay, which is why it's so important that this bill move forward and be debated in this House.

I support the motion for concurrence because I believe that what we have seen over the last year and a half – or two years almost now, I guess we're at – is that there are many people that have been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 virus, not just workers that are working in our health care areas but also our people working in grocery stores, our people who have been servers in restaurants, who have been faced with conflicts with patrons who don't believe that they have to abide by the basic health orders that have been put in place over the last two years. Now, what this piece of legislation would do is that it would recognize that there has been a potential for some of these workers to be exposed to COVID and to contract it at work as well as to acknowledge that having to go to work every single day during a pandemic can create and cause posttraumatic stress disorder.

What we see right now, according to WCB, is that a COVID-19 infection claim is likely to be accepted if a worker contracts the illness and is performing what the province deems an essential service. The issue with that is that it says "likely," and that doesn't guarantee that any individual that applies for supports to get financial assistance or medical assistance because of their diagnosis of COVID-19 will actually receive it. We know that there are outstanding claims that are still waiting to be processed, about 458, I believe, people who have put forward saying that they believe that they contracted COVID-19 at work.

The other issue here is that the employer has the right to say and deny that they believe that that's what actually occurred. Now, this creates conflict. I mean, we've seen it. We've seen it even within the opportunity for this government to do the right thing when it came to supporting these businesses such as restaurants and our grocery store workers. Instead of just immediately putting supports in place, providing financial assistance to businesses so that they're able to put all of those supports in place to protect their workers, it was delayed. There's a gap here where workers were being exposed. I mean, they had to go to work. People needed to buy their groceries. Those basic supports were not necessarily always being provided because some of the smaller businesses weren't able to put those safety measures in place right away.

Again, we need to make sure that those people who were working in these essential services have access to WCB. We know that many of our unionized workers have the ability to advocate to the employer and say, "I've been exposed to COVID-19" or "I have experienced posttraumatic stress due to an experience related to being at work," and they have an advocacy system. The union is able to advocate on their behalf. There's an appeal process. All of those things can occur. Non-unionized workers do not have those supports, and they should. That's the basis of WCB.

Again, I don't think that this is a piece of legislation that really should have been held up in the process. I believe that concurrence should have occurred and that we should be moving forward through the stages. We know, though, that this is part of the process that was created to slow down private members' legislation and that this may be my only opportunity now to speak to the bill that I drafted and introduced into the House. Instead of being able to go through the process of second, Committee of the Whole, and third reading, I now get 10 minutes to speak to a piece of legislation due to a new process, similar to what we've seen the government do with private members' motions and all of these things.

Fundamentally, the whole process for private members to have their voices heard in this Chamber has been significantly impacted by this government, and I think it's a shame. This is our only opportunity in this Chamber and a very rare opportunity in this Chamber to be able to actually speak about pieces of legislation that we're hearing about from our constituents.

To not be able to speak to the piece of legislation and to have the fair ability to be able to put this piece of legislation through all of the different stages of legislation, to be open to being able to have amendments done to this piece of legislation – I mean, I believe fundamentally that the fact that we're at concurrence on this means that both sides of the House understand that this is an important piece of legislation, that they understand that people have gone through traumatic events through COVID and that workers have been put in situations that they would never have thought they would ever have had to be put in, especially those who are working in essential services such as grocery stores and pet stores and things, not necessarily thinking that they would have to be exposed or deal with conflict with people who refuse to wear masks, that don't want to do social distancing, and all of the things that I know we've heard about, you know, servers having beer bottles thrown at their heads because people don't want to abide by the rules, now having to have to ask for vaccine passports and having that responsibility downloaded onto the servers because the government refuses to just mandate that it has to happen.

All of these things have happened, and I believe that on both sides of this House, because of the concurrence, we both fundamentally agree, yet we know that, based on the process, it probably will never get to third reading. It also doesn't give any of the private members in this Chamber the opportunity to make amendments based on what they've heard from their constituents. I think it's a shame. This will probably be my only private member's bill that I get to introduce in the House in this session or in my term, for that matter, no different than the motion that I introduced a while ago that got amended and completely changed.

I think that I am just asking that we move this piece of legislation through the stages that it has the right to go through. I think that the government members really need to be advocating to have their voices heard loudly and proudly in this place and really need to be asking the government why it is that we have to now go through this process. Really, it takes away everybody's voice in this Chamber when private members aren't given the opportunity to spend their Monday afternoons talking about the business that they want to bring forward into the Chamber.

3:10

It's a shame for democracy, I believe, and as an elected person to not be able to go through this process the way that it was intended and the way that the history of our Legislature has allowed – and it actually shuts down debate. I mean, I've been lucky because I get concurrence, which means that both sides of the Chamber at this point, unless I presuppose the outcome of the vote – my understanding is that we were at a consensus on this piece of legislation.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to join debate? In this case I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise on concurrence debate on Bill 219, Workers' Compensation (Expanding Presumptive Coverage) Amendment Act, 2021, brought forward by my venerable colleague from Edmonton-Manning. I very much appreciate the opportunity in concurrence to have this discussion. As the member noted, there is often limited opportunity for us to

fulsomely debate private members' bills in this Legislature or to even have the opportunity to speak to them, which is something, by the way, that's been a great disappointment to me as a private member myself, not realizing the limited opportunities that would take place.

As I'm not a member of the private members' bills committee, which had an opportunity to take a look at this bill and provide a recommendation of concurrence to this Assembly, I would like to get on the record to say how strongly I support fulsome debate in this Legislature around this bill and, hopefully, to hear the stories from the members of this Assembly, who can share what they've been hearing from their constituents in all types of work. I think it's really important to note that this private member's bill was actually brought forward originally by the member back in June of this year, and that predates the fourth wave of this pandemic. Even at that time, I think, the provisions of this bill were incredibly important, but they've even become more so since that bill was introduced as a result of what we've seen during the fourth wave.

To be clear, I mean, this bill that's before us today does a couple of things. The first thing I want to speak about, of course, is the one that it actually brings back in, presumptive coverage under workers' compensation legislation for posttraumatic stress disorder for those who may have experienced that as a result of the pandemic and COVID-19. Now, as with many in this House, I was quite shocked to see legislation brought in by the government late last year which actually ended presumptive coverage for most workers for PTSD in Alberta, with the exception of firefighters, paramedics, peace officers, and police officers, who, by the way, absolutely should have presumptive coverage for PTSD. But it excluded all other workers. I think that if we've seen anything over this past few months in particular, it is how much PTSD is going to be a long-lasting, unfortunate reality for so many people working in various types of work in this province.

Most obviously and most devastatingly, of course, are our health care workers. Like many in this Chamber, I assume that all of us in this Chamber have constituents who work in health care, whether it be as doctors, as nurses, as staff in home care and continuing care centres and doing all kinds of work in the health care system. We all represent these constituents. I don't know about all the members of this Assembly, but I can tell you that conversations that I had with my constituents, particularly in the months of September and October of this year, during the fourth wave, when we saw the health care system come so close to the brink of collapse – and I would argue that it did really collapse, because we saw, as we know, the 15,000 surgeries that have been delayed and postponed, the Albertans living in pain, and the crisis that was placed upon the shoulders, already tired, exhausted shoulders, of health care workers to then carry through the most devastating of the waves that we've seen of this pandemic.

I had multiple conversations with nurses and ICU docs and ER docs and people working in continuing care who were breaking down. There was a time, Mr. Speaker, where I was talking to a constituent every day who would break down in tears telling me their experience of having to work on the front lines, primarily in health care but in all forms, during this pandemic. We are going to see the lasting scars of that kind of burden for years to come.

I spoke to health care workers who told me stories of working in the ICU at the peak of this fourth wave. They were telling me about lineups, a semicircle, essentially, of hospital beds, where every patient was on an intubator, was incredibly sick from COVID. They had to actually put them in a semicircle and help each patient directly, which is contrary to all their standards of care that they're used to providing in ICU, but it was extreme circumstances.

The pressure, the things that they witnessed, the work that they had to do, the decisions that were being made about who is going to have their care and treatment delayed: these are heartbreaking experiences for people who have committed their lives to protecting the health of Albertans. To be making choices and to be making decisions and to see people who are obviously in pain and struggling not being able to get the care they deserve, to watch people intubated for weeks, separated from their families, not being able to actually get the emotional support they need, and then, on top of that, to also face, unfortunately, incredible abuse from patients, from family members of patients, from protesters outside. I don't think that we have yet to understand the full scope of the impact that that's going to have on our front-line health care workers.

To me, this proposal within this Bill 219 to provide presumptive PTSD coverage to all health care, well, to all workers – sorry; to be clear, to all workers – is incredibly important and, unfortunately, is also incredibly necessary. I think that as we sort of see a little bit of a lull, which is great, and that we're seeing cases coming down, we are then going to see what the long-term impact is going to be. I think many front-line health care workers are just getting an opportunity to breathe and rest a little bit, but we also fear what might be coming next in the case of a potential fifth wave. So this is something that's deeply important.

I want to also add that it's not just health care workers. Of course, they are our most visible heroes, really, during this work of carrying on and providing care to Albertans during this fourth wave, but we know that that burden has fallen on so many other workers. As the Member for Edmonton-Manning indicated, you know, nobody would have guessed that working in a grocery store would put you in the line of abuse, nobody would have guessed that serving in a restaurant could put you in a potential line of abuse, but we have seen that that is what has happened, unfortunately, particularly as we've seen the responsibilities of this government downloaded onto individual businesses, onto employers, onto school boards to actually bear the weight without providing clear leadership that would have actually prevented some of the, I would say, division and the really devastating hostility that we've seen during this fourth wave. This is really as a result of incredibly poor leadership and simply putting it down to employers to make those decisions, on individual employees, and let's be clear, many of them are minimum wage workers. They did not sign up.

I think about one of the local coffee shops in my riding that I go to quite regularly, Remedy Cafe, and I just want to give a shout-out to the chai there because it's carried me through many, many days. You know, every time I go there, there's a young person who's sitting at the front entryway, so before you even come into the coffee shop, and that person's job is to check the vaccine passports of those who are coming in. In the first few days that that was in effect, I remember chatting with one of the young people there, and he said that it's been really tough because he's getting yelled at by a lot of people.

We've seen the stress that has been downloaded onto workers across the spectrum of work in this province over the last few months, so I cannot speak highly enough of the fact that there should be this presumptive coverage for PTSD. I'm not saying – and I don't want to minimize PTSD. I don't want to be suggesting that anybody who's, you know, experienced some hardship during this past little while has PTSD. PTSD is a very serious condition, and there are very real supports and needed supports that are necessary for it. But I just want to say that we have seen an extraordinary amount of strain and stress and emotional abuse piled on workers on all fronts, so certainly our front-line health care workers deserve that presumptive coverage as well as many others.

I also want to give a shout-out to all the teachers and school staff, who have done extraordinary work to manage this pandemic but who are also bearing the weight of that. I can speak as somebody whose partner, you know, during the previous waves of the pandemic, spent hours and hours and hours on the weekend and evenings – every day his phone going off; ding, ding, ding every time there was a new case in that school. And I know that the staff at his school, including himself, were responsible for doing contact tracing because contact tracing had collapsed or, in the case of this fourth wave, wasn't even happening.

3:20

Those are responsibilities that nobody anticipated they would have to take, and we know that there are going to be long-term implications. I really believe that this is incredibly timely even though it was introduced in June, even more so now because of this fourth wave of this pandemic. I think we all need to take responsibility for the long-term emotional scars that are left on people working on the front line. We need to take responsibility, and that means providing presumptive PTSD coverage in WCB. That is our responsibility. We cannot simply expect people to do this work out of the goodness of their hearts and have to bear the costs when, really, they did all this work for us.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Next I believe I see the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Mr. Rowsell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to concurrence on Bill 219. The committee's recommendation is that the bill proceed to second reading, a recommendation I support. It was, in fact, unanimously supported by every single member on the committee from all sides of the House. I'm surprised that the members opposite wish to debate this recommendation, especially since it was their colleague from Edmonton-Manning who created the bill.

Albertans have weathered the COVID-19 storm for many months now and have sacrificed a great deal to protect themselves, their families, and the province as a whole. Our province's essential workers – those who are on the front lines in AHS, the police forces, and other occupations – that face heightened risk of contracting COVID-19, know this sacrifice more than anybody. To wake up each and every morning and go to work knowing that there is a chance you could be putting yourself in harm's way is truly heroic.

The province of Alberta and those of us in this Chamber thank you for your dedication and the protection you provide during the pandemic. We can all agree, I hope, that the government should do all it can to support workers and work to protect them from this virus as they do for us on a daily basis. The opposition, however, believes that this government is leaving these workers behind. They believe that this government is making it more difficult or is unwilling to compensate these workers in the event that they do contract the virus while working.

This is simply not true, Mr. Speaker, so if the members opposite insist on wasting the Chamber's time and the time of hard-working Albertans debating something that we all agree on, I will use my allotted time to address some of the misinformation that the opposition has brought forward on the matter.

First, I would like to respond to some of the misinformation on compensation for lost time due to COVID-19 that has been pushed by the NDP. As I touched on earlier, the opposition would have Albertans believe that individuals who contract COVID-19 in the workplace are being left without compensation. This is false. In

reality, the vast majority of claims made to the WCB have been accepted; 87 per cent, to be precise. This is a far cry from the zero support and compensation that the Official Opposition and some unions claim, Mr. Speaker.

The dedicated WCB team, which has expertise in the field of infectious disease, works hard to guide their clients through the recovery, works proactively to identify workplace outbreaks of the COVID-19 virus, and ensures that claims are reported immediately and benefits issued as expeditiously as possible to the individuals affected. It does this through what are the most extensive COVID-19 cost-relief measures in the country.

Between January of 2020 and April 30, 2021, 8,200 COVID-related claims were accepted by the WCB. These claims represent \$19 million in benefits which will go to our Albertan workers who have been infected with the virus at their workplace. The benefits provide the individual workers coverage for a minimum of two weeks while they are infected with the virus. This coverage then extends to any period where this confirmed, ongoing disablement is due to COVID-19.

These numbers show, Mr. Speaker, that this government has not left our essential workers behind and has not left those who are unable to work due to an infection without compensation. The NDP have clearly not done their due diligence as this would have uncovered these facts. In addition to the opposition's misinformation on COVID-19 infection, they have also claimed that our government has removed WCB coverage for workers suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder stemming from trauma experienced in the workplace.

Mr. Speaker, this is again simply not the case. In reality, workers who suffer from PTSD, with that trauma originating in the workplace experience, have access to coverage through the normal claim process. Presumptive coverage is also available to those individuals who work in occupations in which workers have a higher risk of experiencing traumatic events. These occupations include our much-lauded essential workers, individuals who keep us and our families safe. These highly stressful work environments happen to be the same as for some of our province's most important workers, with first responders, correctional officers, and emergency dispatchers all working tirelessly to keep Albertans safe.

This government has certainly not taken support away from these workers, as the opposition hopes to assert. It is once again the diligent WCB team who aid individuals who are diagnosed with work-related psychological injuries and make sure they receive not only financial support but, even more importantly, the critical treatment and support that they require.

There are plenty of other matters that if this Chamber spent our time addressing would benefit Albertans far more than the opposition's desire to debate a process that is already in place and that we agree on.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to the concurrence debate around Bill 219. First of all, I just want to take a moment to address some of the alleged misinformation that the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright claimed to refute, and just a comms note for the UCP caucus: if you want to have a credible voice for information reputation, perhaps putting up the member who stands up every time and calls climate change a Chinese conspiracy may not be your best foot forward.

First of all, I want to address a couple of the alleged pieces of misinformation that the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright tried to address. Now, he talked about the fact that we're spreading misinformation about COVID patients not getting coverage and then said that 87 per cent of people who apply for these work-related COVID coverage claims through the WCB get coverage. Well, 87 per cent is not 100 per cent. Even under the new UCP curriculum I'm pretty sure that math teachers will still teach students that. That's what this bill is about. It's about providing 100 per cent coverage for everybody who is listed as an eligible worker who has a COVID claim and that as long as they say that they contracted COVID at work, they would be given coverage. So when the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright gets up and says that we're spreading misinformation and then goes on to say that not all of the claims are accepted, he's actually proving our point.

To the other really outrageous claim that he made around posttraumatic stress disorder and our claim that presumptive coverage was removed, well, I'm pretty sure that the member was here in December of 2020 when that bill was passed into law, removing presumptive coverage from posttraumatic stress disorder. I'm pretty sure that he actually voted in favour of that law. Why is it now that he's standing up and saying that the thing that is actually the law of the land isn't the law of the land? We all know that the government removed presumptive coverage of PTSD for all of the workers who were included in this Bill 219. It's outrageous, Mr. Speaker, that the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright would get up and claim otherwise when he and his whole caucus voted in favour of the very legislation that removed that coverage and is the reason that we're bringing this forward.

I just want to spend a little bit of time talking about the need to have meaningful presumptive coverage for people who have contracted COVID-19 in the workplace. I just looked on the Alberta COVID website, and as of November 18, 331,626 Albertans have contracted COVID. Now, those are the confirmed cases, Mr. Speaker. We don't know how many Albertans have actually contracted COVID because, of course, not everyone who has symptoms gets tested. There are probably a number of other Albertans out there who have actually contracted COVID and may still be suffering the long-term effects of that. The need to provide those people with WCB – of those 331,000 we don't know how many would be eligible for this kind of presumptive coverage because we don't know how many people would qualify even as essential workers. The government doesn't keep a list of who qualifies as an essential worker. Of the 331,000 confirmed cases of COVID, it's likely that more than half of those people will suffer some kind of long COVID symptoms.

3:30

There's a piece of research that was published at the end of October by Penn State school of medicine, a pretty highly reputable organization not prone to spreading misinformation or exaggerating claims. This study indicates that more than half of the people who contracted COVID-19 will display some kind of long COVID symptoms, Mr. Speaker. I think it's worth while to remind members of the House what long-term COVID symptoms include. This includes permanent lung damage, permanent kidney damage, permanent brain damage, long-term loss of smell, long-term sense of fatigue, among other things.

You know, our leader, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, held a press conference with a woman named Stacey Robins, who was infected with COVID a year ago, December 2020. She's still suffering from long COVID symptoms. She said in that press conference that she still has fatigue, hand tremors, brain fog, and

electric shocks in her leg and that she had to give up her line of work because these long COVID symptoms have been so bad. Now, I also have friends who have long COVID symptoms. My friend Mira was diagnosed with COVID a number of months ago, and she tells me that she still has a feeling of fatigue, the brain fog that goes along with it. Fortunately, she is still able to do her job, but there are potentially hundreds of thousands of Albertans who have such severe long COVID symptoms that they are no longer able to work, and that's why it's incredibly important that we ask this government to provide presumptive coverage for WCB claims.

You know, it was incredibly terrifying in December 2020. My own daughter is a health care aide. She works at a continuing care facility here in Edmonton. She was incredibly excited to get her first job in December 2020 as a health care aide. She tried for a long time to get her foot in the door. Because the demand for health care aides during the height of the second wave was so high, she finally managed to land her first job in her field of study. But knowing that she would be going to work every day in a setting where she was at an incredibly high risk of contracting COVID herself, not to mention spreading it to people who were at really high risk of severe outcomes, was a terrifying thought to me. My daughter was only 19 years old. What if she were to go to work, contract COVID, and come down with these long-term COVID symptoms that would render her unable to work for the rest of her life? At 19, Mr. Speaker.

Now, you know, it's not that continuing care facilities have a reputation of dealing with their WCB claims fairly. If that had happened to my daughter or if that had happened to my friend Mira, I would want them to be guaranteed to be eligible for coverage under the Workers' Compensation program so that they could at least care for themselves if they had been unable to work as a result of contracting COVID in the workplace.

The government has done so very little to protect people from COVID. We've had some of the highest rates of COVID contraction in the entire country. We've had some of the highest rates of COVID death in the entire country. The very least that they could do is admit that they were wrong, that they failed to protect the people of Alberta from contracting COVID and at least put in some kind of mitigative measures to make sure that they're able to look after themselves once they've contracted COVID and come down with these long COVID symptoms, but they're not even willing to do that.

I mean, it's interesting to hear the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright say that, you know, the opposition is wasting time by debating this concurrence motion. "Everybody in the committee agreed that this should be going forward, but, oh, by the way, we don't think that this piece of legislation is necessary," which tells me and everybody who is listening to this debate that they don't intend to vote in favour of this legislation.

At the very least, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to be able to speak to this concurrence motion to at least have an opportunity to make the members opposite feel bad for their failure to look after the people whose policies led directly to them getting sick in the first place. I urge all of my fellow members to vote in concurrence and then get on to actually voting in favour of this bill.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to join? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has the call.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to join debate on Bill 219, Workers' Compensation (Expanding Presumptive Coverage) Amendment Act, 2021, brought forward by

the MLA for Edmonton-Manning. Of course, I'm going to speak in favour of this motion for concurrence that the bill proceed to the Assembly for debate. Certainly, I think that one of the key roles that we play as MLAs is that we put information on the record about where we stand regarding legislation that is brought forward, so I'm very pleased to stand and to debate this. It's certainly not a waste of time. It's an important aspect of my work, as it is every member's here, and I do take a little bit of affront to the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright saying that we're wasting time because I think it's really important that we be heard.

Of course, this is very important legislation because, as we all know, we've been through a very difficult few years with the pandemic. Certainly, I want to acknowledge that I have a privileged position. I am not on the front lines like the people who this bill is meant to support. I have that privilege of not having to work in a hospital setting, but certainly some of my colleagues who are – I'm a social worker, and I know my colleagues are on the front lines in hospital settings doing what they can to support people in, frankly, some pretty risky situations and also, you know, in continuing care facilities across this province. We know how devastating COVID-19 has been in continuing care settings. We know that almost 1,400 seniors have died in those facilities in Alberta, which is a huge tragedy. Certainly, my heart goes out to all those Albertans who lost loved ones.

Myself, personally, I can speak. I have elderly parents. My mom is 84, and my father is 92. Both of them, just recently, are living in separate facilities. That just happened in July. For many, many years they lived together in sort of a – it was kind of a more independent setting for seniors, but they did have some home care. There was extra health care. Sadly, my mom broke her arm over the summer, and we kind of got a better idea about some of the challenges she was experiencing with my father, who does have dementia. His needs were much greater than Mom could handle. Certainly, she was hospitalized because of her broken arm, and I got to see first-hand that, you know, his needs were pretty significant. Really, Mom wasn't able to support him in that role anymore. So both of them are in different facilities. Mom is in a lodge, and Dad now is in a secure facility for people experiencing dementia.

3:40

I feel like I have, not only professionally through my work and being the critic for Seniors and Housing – certainly, understanding that there are so many issues in our continuing care system that COVID-19 has really, I guess, shone the light very brightly on our vulnerabilities in that system. I think one of the key concerns is just the vulnerable workers in those facilities. This bill – and that's why, certainly, I am in support of the motion for concurrence – would support workers in those facilities to be able to ensure they had access to presumptive coverage for contracting COVID-19 in the workplace and PTSD.

You know, certainly, early on the continuing care system, I think, was overwhelmed very quickly with COVID-19 cases, and because of the population served, a more vulnerable, frail population, we had the significant tragedy that I've already identified of almost 1,400 seniors dying in continuing care. We know that vulnerable workers, sadly, did spread COVID from facility to facility to facility, unfortunately. That was not the fault of the workers, but that's kind of because the system is set up to make a profit. It's really meant to keep workers' wages as low as possible, keep them all part-time so benefits don't have to be paid out to them. These are precarious workers who have to cobble together a job, so they may work at one, two, three facilities. Maybe they work in the fast food industry plus in a continuing care facility, often for minimum

wage. These workers aren't making much. Oftentimes these workers are women. Oftentimes these workers are newcomers to Canada. All of this combines to create a very difficult situation, and we saw it here in Alberta that so many vulnerable seniors were sadly – they contracted COVID and, as I said, some passed on or some were very ill due to that. That's why this bill is so important to pass.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. I hesitate to interrupt you; however, we have under the standing orders reached the total time for debate on this matter.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:44 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery	Neudorf	Sigurdson, R.J.
Dang	Nicolaides	Singh
Fir	Nielsen	Smith
Getson	Pancholi	Stephan
Horner	Rehn	Toews
Hunter	Renaud	Toor
Irwin	Rosin	Turton
Issik	Rutherford	van Dijken
Jones	Savage	Walker
LaGrange	Schmidt	Williams
Long	Schow	Wilson
McIver	Schulz	Yaseen
Nally	Sigurdson, L.	

4:00

Totals: For – 38 Against – 0

[Motion for concurrence carried unanimously]

Bill 220 Employment Standards (Expanding Bereavement Leave) Amendment Act, 2021

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, on November 3, 2021, the chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills presented the report of that committee on Bill 220, Employment Standards (Expanding Bereavement Leave) Amendment Act, 2021, and requested concurrence of the Assembly in the report, which recommended that the bill proceed. As a member other than the mover rose to speak on November 3, 2021, debate on the motion will proceed today.

The motion to concur with the committee's report on Bill 220 has already been moved, and I will therefore now recognize any additional members who wish to speak. Are there any members who wish to speak? I see the hon. Member for Sherwood Park has risen.

Mr. Walker: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good afternoon to everyone. It is an honour to rise in this House and speak to concurrence regarding my bill that I put forward as a private member, which is such a great honour, Bill 220, the Employment Standards (Expanding Bereavement Leave) Amendment Act, 2021. I have some prepared remarks that I want on *Hansard* eternally, and then I will move, if I have some time, to some on-the-fly remarks.

Again, what an honour this is. I stand here today, Mr. Speaker, to speak in favour of Bill 220, Employment Standards (Expanding

Bereavement Leave) Amendment Act, 2021. Even though miscarriage and stillbirth are not openly discussed in our society, they are, sadly, not uncommon. In the case of miscarriage the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada estimate that as many as 1 in 4 women suffer a miscarriage. This type of loss can have a devastating impact on expectant parents' mental and physical well-being, negatively impacting their home life and their workplace.

As it stands right now, Mr. Speaker, employees are entitled to three days of bereavement leave per year upon the death of a family member. If passed, this bill would clarify the definition of job-protected bereavement leave to include parents who experience a miscarriage or stillbirth, and it would clarify that anyone who would have been a parent as a result of such a pregnancy is entitled to bereavement leave.

Throughout the last couple of months I have sought feedback from various stakeholders and constituents to identify the different ways in which this bill would impact people and businesses, et cetera. I have met with organizations that advocate for businesses and municipalities in addition to experts that support those who have experienced miscarriage and stillbirth. I am happy to report that they all overwhelmingly support Bill 220.

During one stakeholder meeting, Mr. Speaker, a pregnancy and infant loss support organization based in Calgary shared that they have seen an increase of 300 per cent in demand for their services during the pandemic. There is no doubt that the pandemic has severely affected families who have experienced a miscarriage or stillbirth. I have had several constituents share their stories of loss and how the COVID pandemic added stress to an already challenging situation. All MLAs are hearing this over the course of the pandemic, including in the unfortunate case of miscarriage and stillbirth. The isolation from their families has made it even harder to navigate through their grief and their loss. This is why it is essential that the members in this House, regardless of which side they stand on in this House, support this bill during these challenging times.

I also believe that Bill 220 is a significant opportunity to recognize, dignify, elevate, and clarify the grief and loss that people experience after miscarriage and stillbirth. It is profound; it is real. Mr. Speaker, miscarriage and stillbirth cause reproductive trauma, shame, and stigma. They hurt parents' hopes, dreams, beliefs. In another of the stakeholder meetings I was able to connect with Dr. Janet Jaffe from the Center for Reproductive Psychology in San Diego. She shared that according to research from the American psychology association it takes about a year to process the loss of a loved one. Meanwhile the loss of a baby, including an unborn child, takes approximately two years according to the academic research.

Bill 220 would initiate a meaningful conversation to help destigmatize these issues in our society and is very relevant because it would be the first piece of legislation that addresses such a profound topic as this in Canada. Its broad language ensures that the eligibility covers the diversity that makes up the 21st-century family, including surrogacy cases, Mr. Speaker. I should mention that I did hear from several stakeholders that three days is probably not enough time due to the profound impact that miscarriage and stillbirth have on parents. However, they also noted that accessing bereavement leave is a significant first step in our society, which is why we are all here today. I'm honoured to speak to this in concurrence.

Mr. Speaker, we already count on job-protected leave for people whose family members have passed away. It only makes sense to extend the same leave to those experiencing loss from miscarriage or stillbirth. While this bill was being discussed in the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills, a

very important question was raised. It was about the other existing leaves under the employment standards and if bereavement leave is the appropriate leave to amend to include miscarriage and stillbirth. Parents who experience a miscarriage or stillbirth may be eligible for other leaves, depending on each situation; however, bereavement leave is the only one explicitly designated to mourn and deal with the grief associated with losing a loved one. Again, we want to clarify, specify, elevate, and dignify this specific situation through legislation.

Questions were also made regarding the physical well-being of women who experience miscarriage or stillbirth and how much it takes them to recover physically and how it can change depending on each woman. It is very much case by case. Mothers who experience a stillbirth within 16 weeks of their due date are eligible to take up to 16 weeks of unpaid maternity leave. This leave, however, Mr. Speaker, is only available to the birth mother and is intended to provide job-protected leave while they recover from their pregnancy. Maternity leave is not available to the spouse of the mother or adoptive parents.

Again, this bill is about recognizing, dignifying, elevating, and clarifying the grief and loss that people experience after miscarriage and stillbirth. It is to acknowledge that the women who experience a miscarriage or stillbirth and their partners are navigating through tremendous grief while experiencing many other challenges in their lives and workplaces and that they deserve to be able to take some time off to deal with such loss without fear of losing their jobs. They're already dealing with enough severe trauma from the miscarriage or stillbirth, Mr. Speaker.

I am looking forward to the concurrence debate today, and I sincerely encourage all members of this House to support Bill 220, the Employment Standards (Expanding Bereavement Leave) Amendment Act, 2021.

With that, Mr. Speaker, could I have a time check?

The Acting Speaker: It's 220, both the bill and your time check. Sorry. Like, you've got two minutes and 20 seconds.

Mr. Walker: Okay. Two minutes and 20 seconds. Thank you so much.

What I wanted to do in the remaining time – and I look forward to all of the speeches that are to come – I just wanted to quickly thank the members of the private members' private bills committee, on both sides of the House. The opposition contributions were incredible, very thoughtful, in a spirit of bipartisanship, and I thought they added great value to the discussion. I want to recognize the Member for Edmonton-Riverview and the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood especially for very thoughtful contributions, very compassionate, as well as the members on the government side; the Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat submitted some great contributions and the chair of that committee, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

4:10

I also want to thank on this incredible journey – you know, we get into politics to make a difference, really, and have an impact. One of the biggest reasons I ran in 2019 was to support women and families, and over the course of the pandemic talking to constituents over the loss of miscarriage and stillbirth, it really had a profound impact, so I said to myself that if and when I was to be so lucky to win a private members' draw, I would put forward this in a noble effort to support women and families.

I want to thank all the great stakeholders that I was able to meet with. Quick shout-outs to Aditi Loveridge of the pregnancy, miscarriage, and infant loss, healing, and coaching services in

Calgary; Gail Haynes of the Canadian Mental Health Association; Dr. Janet Jaffe from the Center for Reproductive Psychology was wonderful as well. The economic lens is also to be considered here, and we also met with the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. I want to thank them for their thoughtful contributions. You know, they were saying that a lot of employers, they believe, are already giving some leave for time off.

I'm so happy we can continue this debate. Please support Bill 220. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. member who caught my eye was the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, as I like to do the first time I get to speak in a week, I just thank all those folks who continue to do so much for all of us on the front lines. We like to think about health care workers and educators. Given the content of this bill, Bill 220, I also think about those folks who work in pretty difficult situations who may not have access to the supports that they need. We know that COVID has very much exacerbated and highlighted the huge gaps that we have as far as supports for workers, so I'll be thinking about them as I speak to this bill.

Prior to getting into some of the specifics around Bill 220, I do just need to point out the confusing statements by the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright, who was railing on about wasting time. Those were his direct words on debate for concurrence. I'm not sure how it's wasting time. In fact, it's quite confusing that he would be critical of us when it's actually your own members who asked for a concurrence debate. Let us please clear the record on that one. As the Member for Sherwood Park, who I thank for bringing this forward, has noted, this is a really important conversation. Like him, I am a member – or I guess he's not a member – of the private members' bills committee, and he was there to join us at a couple of the previous meetings.

I was quite – well, I have many things to say on this, but it was a rare moment of multipartisan support and love in particular for my friend Aditi Loveridge, who is a phenomenal woman, who is the head of the pregnancy and infant loss centre in Calgary. I had the opportunity, actually, with the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud to first meet her – gosh, COVID time is very confusing. It has to be over a year ago, for sure. You know, we had happened to reach out to her to learn more about her work. I think we actually first met each other on Twitter, in fact, and that turned into a meeting when we just talked about the important work that she does. I was quite clear to her then that it was a topic that, quite frankly, I didn't know a whole heck of a lot about and that I certainly wanted to learn. We had the opportunity to hear from her at the private members' bills committee. I had the opportunity to actually meet her again this summer, and we had a good conversation about the work that she does. It was quite serendipitous that the MLA for Sherwood Park had also connected with her.

You know, I'm going to talk specifically about some of the things that she brought up, but before I get there, we made it quite clear in the meeting that we're quite hopeful about this bill because we need to destigmatize these sorts of conversations, and we need to have them out there. People who are impacted by pregnancy loss, in whatever form it comes, need to know that they have supports and that they are supported and protected.

One of the things we talked about in the previous private members' bills committee was just the very all-encompassing impacts that pregnancy loss can have: emotional impacts; long-term, short-term mental impacts; and, of course, physical impacts as well. You know, one of the things that I really wanted to dig into was some of

the specifics around language in particular. Really, when we have an opportunity – it's been said in this House that nongovernment MLAs have very few opportunities to put forth legislation, and it's a real honour when you're able to do so – we want to support the private member in getting his bill right.

One of the things that I want to talk about was a pretty important question and something that's come up multiple times, actually, and quite recently as well, and that's the topic of abortion and ensuring that within pregnancy loss that definition is really clear, that it's an expansive one that will include really the vast array of experiences of birthing persons. We really want to ensure that there's an expanded definition of pregnancy loss.

I asked Ms Loveridge in our meeting specifically about this. I said: you know, would late termination and pregnancy loss through abortion be covered by this bill? She said that she absolutely hopes so. I'm just going to share a little bit about what she said. Having the language clear so that it's included, termination for medical reasons, or TFMR, as it's known in the community, and abortion – she shared that she sees a lot of people in her centre that need support after their experiences. She said that if the language isn't expansive and inclusive, there will be a lot of people, a lot of folks in the community who are left unsupported. She said – and this is a really important point – that those folks who are, you know, either in the TFMR community or those who have lost a baby due to abortion already find themselves without support.

Again, she told us about just the countless number of folks that she has coming through their doors all the time looking for support. Her point being that when folks are already dealing with infant loss, already dealing with a range of experiences – the shame, the guilt, and the spiritual, the emotional, the mental health impact – already dealing with so, so very much, they need to have those clear supports in place, right? It's really critical here that we can get that language correct.

I'm hopeful that we will take the advice of our esteemed stakeholder, who we actually both put forward as our stakeholder, and take the advice of somebody who's there on the front lines, who deals with the very different experiences of folks in the community. I'm looking forward to that, and I'm hopeful that we'll be able to have a bit more of a conversation about that. You know, this is a real opportunity just to show, again, that we are inclusive.

4:20

I'm slightly concerned – I don't want to presuppose, absolutely not – that we won't have support on this piece. Again, I'm always the optimist; however, you know, I did see this weekend members of this government support – well, I shouldn't say members of this government – members of their party support conscience rights coming back. Actually, no, there were at least some private members . . . [interjection] That's true. I do know that. I wasn't there, but I do know that there were at least two private members who spoke in support of conscience rights.

Of course, in another private members' bills committee back, to the day, around November 21, 2019, in fact, two years ago, we shared the deep concerns from providers at that point as well, including abortion providers, including physicians across this province, including folks in the queer and trans community. I'm fearful that when we have government members or at least private members who are still wanting to bring back conscience rights and wanting to potentially reopen the abortion debate, we may not have support, but again I'm hopeful because we've had a lot of collegiality on this bill to date. I will wait to see the conversation. I just really want to make sure we honour our stakeholders.

Those were the key items that I wanted to point out. I also actually – sorry. I forgot to mention that – I'm sure I'm running out

of time. I am running out of time, so I will let my colleagues speak to what we passed at our council.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that. In this role as an MLA there are moments where we have intimate interactions with our constituents. Sometimes it can be just business back and forth, doing our best to help them out and get an item across the line for them, to get them information they need. Other times there are moments of real, close, intimate interactions.

I just had a constituent, who I was on the phone with moments before entering the Chamber, who was sharing with me, unsolicited, that she has had seven miscarriages. Mr. Speaker, it was heartbreaking to hear, and you could hear the sadness in her voice, a real tragedy. I had no choice but to have the normal human reaction of empathy for her, sympathy for the difficult life that she has gone through. She wants nothing more than to be a mother of children, and she hasn't had that opportunity yet. Every single month she and her husband are hoping that they're pregnant again but fearful that maybe it'll be another miscarriage. Over and over again, every month, every time the month renews, they both have this hope but a hope they bury out of fear that it might end in a miscarriage.

That grief that they face she shared with me, not because this bill is being debated – it's a completely separate issue – but she opened herself needlessly to me, vulnerably, and I'm grateful for that opportunity. In some ways it feels providential that right before this I got to hear that and share with her that I feel so deeply for her. I believe that every member of this Chamber, too, no matter of political affiliation, feels for women like this, for families like this that want nothing more than another child, to be a mother or a father, and to play with their baby, but they can't because they have miscarriage after miscarriage.

A stat that stuck with me, that the Member for Sherwood Park brought forward, was that 1 in 4 pregnancies end in miscarriage. Oh, Mr. Speaker, what a horror. How hard that must be for all of these women. It stays with them for a lifetime. It's so sad because they want nothing more than to have that fulfilling love of their child in their arms, but they can't no matter what they do. They wonder: is it something they've done wrong? They blame themselves, sadly, more often than not. Being able to recognize this publicly in this space does give space for these women to grieve, does give them the opportunity to have some sort of emotional reconciliation, so I give credit to the committee that brought this forward for concurrence, that we're able to have this conversation now, because it's real, it's meaningful, it's nonpartisan, and it has intimately affected so many women in this province.

I can tell you, sadly, on a separate note, that my mother recently passed away from a very short fight with an aggressive form of cancer. I remember sitting in the hospital room with her, having conversations we never had, and she brought up that she had miscarriages. I didn't know that as a young child. I didn't know that my mom had three miscarriages. I'll not forget how she had to reconcile that in a time where she wasn't allowed to grieve, to say that she felt like she had a loss. It was a time in our society where we'd say: "It just happens. Move on. Try again." For some they're lucky, like my mother, and she did – I'm not sure everyone else agrees, but thankfully I'm here today.

Not all women get to have that opportunity to be mothers with their babies in their arms. I tell them now: you are mothers, and that can never be taken away from you. The love that you have is real. It is. I say that on the Chamber floor right now for all to hear. You

are a mother, and you're right to love the children that you've lost. But that doesn't necessarily help the problem that you have, and there is little that we can do in this Chamber that can. One thing that we can do to mitigate is to unanimously support this bill from the Member for Sherwood Park. It is meaningful, it is real, and it changes the lives of mothers and families altogether so that they can grieve together and recognize that it hurts. That hurt is real, and we as a state recognize that what you've lost is something real.

I don't want to get into a debate about contentious issues here. I want to respect and dignify these young women and recognize that they have a real pain to grapple with and that our laws in our society should reflect the pain that they are grappling with. To the Member for Edmonton-Highland Norwood, who spoke before me, I say: be not afraid of the members on this side. We will happily support and endorse anything that would expand support for mothers, no matter the circumstances that brought them into that difficult spot they're in, the miscarriages or abortions. No matter what it is, I think we all should agree that they deserve that support. You'll find no quarrel with me and, I suggest, any member on this side if any motions were to be brought forward for amendments.

I think it's incredibly important that we recognize every single mother. We recognize that the miscarriages they had, every single one of them – like I said, one of my constituents had seven – all of them are true losses. We do our best in this Chamber as the voice of the people to pay respect to them, to dignify them in what we say here but also in the laws that we pass, the rule of law that we hold the authority of in this Chamber. I hope and I pray that we can pass this before we leave the Chamber at the end of December.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. member who caught my eye is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to add my voice to the debate around Bill 220. Certainly, I just want to thank the Member for Sherwood Park for bringing this bill forward. You know, the MLAs on this side of the House see the value in this bill and the importance of us really having legislation to support a person who may be experiencing this loss. I am grateful for having the opportunity to talk about that because, sadly, as has already been articulated on both sides of this House, there is a stigma, and it seems to be kind of a not-spoken-about concern in our society and a not-acknowledged one. This bill goes some of the way towards supporting people who are experiencing a loss due to pregnancy, but of course we always can improve things, so I'm certainly going to share a little bit about that. I think that it's so important that we are debating this bill in the House today and really can work towards destigmatizing pregnancy loss.

4:30

Like the hon. Member for Peace River, who just shared – he talked about a constituent who had shared her own personal story about significant, significant loss from miscarriages – over the weekend I was in contact with a constituent of my own and his family about the loss that they've experienced through miscarriage. They are very fortunate and blessed to have two beautiful little girls that, certainly, I've had the opportunity to meet. You know, they've attended Zoom meetings, for sure, and they're just adorable little ones. He shared with me that between the birth of their eldest daughter and their second, during that time their family had experienced three miscarriages. He did share with me how difficult that was, that whole process, and how pleased he was to see this legislation come forward for offering support to his family. Because

of the type of employment he has, he did receive some support, but he knows that many people don't have that. This legislation will be much more inclusive so people in a broader range of careers and workplaces can have that.

The reason that I did hear about this specifically was because – actually, this weekend I note that the members of the UCP were at their annual general meeting; the members of the NDP were at our Provincial Council. During that time we actually passed a resolution that is similar to this legislation. That is why my constituent did share with me just the challenges that his family experienced and how grateful he was that we had moved forward on this resolution. Our resolution certainly goes further than Bill 220 and is, I think, more inclusive. And we did talk at committee – I, too, am on the private members' bills committee – about actually expanding the definition of pregnancy loss.

As my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood did express, abortion and termination – she had more detail about the correct terms used – should also be included because those are significant losses as well. People experiencing these, and their support system, should be supported by this. Certainly, that was something that we agreed on, and this resolution was passed at our Provincial Council, so that is good.

Another thing that's a bit different, that we did talk about at committee, is not to just sort of define this only under bereavement leave, so the death – you know, bereavement is about a death, of course. I think there could be some legal challenges, some misunderstandings around when life starts and when it ends, so I just wanted a more inclusive term like “family and personal leave” as opposed to bereavement so that this legislation – you know, that is something else that we'd like to see. Of course, moving things forward at all is a positive step, and certainly I want to support this legislation and do indeed know that we are still moving forward with it, and I'm grateful for that.

It does give three days, I guess it is, of unpaid leave. Of course, that is a minimal provision. You know, there are different jurisdictions all across the world, really, that have legislation that does give more time. I mean, three days when you experience a significant loss is not a very long time. Of course, it is a step in the right direction, but I would just offer that three days is pretty minimal.

Certainly, on both sides of the House we appreciated so much the expertise of Aditi Loveridge, who is the founder of the Pregnancy & Infant Loss Support Centre of Calgary and certainly has worked deeply in this area, has her own personal experience, and has supported families all across our province.

She does talk about that pregnancy loss often takes a substantial amount of time, at minimum, she says, three weeks. So not three days but three weeks. Therefore, she had suggested that we lengthen the time allotted for people to be on this kind of job-protected leave because there is a significant impact on people, and we know that their emotional, mental health is impacted. If they can have that support for a longer period of time, then they're more likely to be able to heal from a very trying, difficult situation without the added stress of not being secure, knowing that they can go back to that job that they hold and not going back prematurely. They may not be in a really stable place where it feels like it's safe for them to be there.

Of course, the unpaid part of it would be challenging for anyone to not have the income that they regularly rely on. That would create more stress for them, so this is another area. As I've said already, it is a move in the right direction, and we certainly do support that. We want to make sure that this kind of legislation does move forward so that people do get support and that they're not suffering in isolation and that employers recognize that people do need this support. At this time the legislation does say that it is three days of unpaid leave. So that's very important for the legislation. In time

perhaps we can think more grandly and more broadly about what would perhaps be a fuller support for people experiencing these significant losses.

I'll just echo some of the comments of the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood regarding the inclusion of not only miscarriage and stillbirth but also loss due to abortion, pregnancy termination. Certainly, people are impacted by that. That's important to be included in this legislation. That is something that we certainly did pass in our resolution on the weekend. We want to make sure that it's as inclusive as possible, making sure that people are supported – you know, there's a vast array of different challenges people experience – and of course the inclusion of their partners, their support system, making sure that they have access to this leave as well.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat has risen.

Mrs. Frey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I gladly rise today to speak in support of Bill 220, the Employment Standards (Expanding Bereavement Leave) Amendment Act, 2021, proposed by my wonderful colleague from Sherwood Park. Our hon. colleague for Sherwood Park always has a lot to say in this Legislature. I always find that when he's speaking, I'm enthralled because he's so passionate about the issues that he brings to the table. Whether that be on social media or in the Chamber or in caucus, wherever it is, I just know that the Member for Sherwood Park cares very deeply about Alberta families and his constituents. So I just want to say thank you to him for bringing this forward on behalf of so many grieving women and families who recognize – and I recognize, for certain – that this bill is an important step in recognizing that every life is sacred and has inherent value.

For me, Mr. Speaker, I couldn't be more proud to rise to speak to Bill 220 today. Usually in motions of concurrence we talk about also what happened in committee. I want to just start off by saying that I really do appreciate the comments from the members opposite. I think there are so many opportunities in this Legislature where we see division and we see it's an all-out drag-out war between two major parties in the province here. But it's nice to see us all coming together on one issue, and that issue is supporting women and families.

4:40

I want to start off by talking about what happens after a miscarriage. You know, I've been pretty far removed from these issues for a very long time just because, you know, we haven't been trying to get pregnant. I'll be totally honest. You know, we just got married about eight weeks ago, and we were thinking about family planning and all of these things. But I have to admit, Mr. Speaker, that, for me, this is becoming a very intimate topic. For myself personally, I have polycystic ovary syndrome, which essentially affects fertility. It affects a lot of things in your life, but one of the biggest things is that it does affect your ability to have children. So I know it's going to be an uphill battle for me personally, and I just want to thank the Member for Sherwood Park and other members in this Chamber that women like me and other women who have actually experienced miscarriage know that they will be supported by Alberta's government as well as every elected member of the Chamber.

You know, I'm also very close to a lot of women in my life, of course a lot of young women who are trying to have families, and I have watched first-hand the absolute anguish that these women face. Pardon me, Mr. Speaker. My best friend is the most wonderful mother, I think – thank you – the most wonderful mother I've ever

met in my life besides my own. She is struggling, and her family is struggling. One of the things that I think has been very helpful for many people like her is that she has been very open about her grief. Now, not all women are prepared to do that. For some women, you know, they do suffer in silence, and these families suffer in silence. They feel that, as the Member for Peace River said, they should just get up and move on, dust your feet off and try again. It's not that simple for so many people, and for her, it's been an absolute battle.

Picture this, Mr. Speaker. You have women and families who are excited. They've got their car seat purchased, they've got their nursery set up, they are rip-roaring and ready to go, to welcome that baby into the family, and then all of a sudden something traumatic happens. They've told everyone, but they're going to lose that pregnancy.

We have different terms for miscarriage. There's also something where we say that a child was born sleeping. You know, these children, no matter what stage they are at in their life, whether it's conception or shortly thereafter, or they are delivered through stillbirth or abortion: I mean, we know that these children are valued and deserve to have their lives grieved and celebrated. But the problem is that so many of these parents are scared to talk to their employer, or they think that it's not that big of a deal because we've socialized this conversation around miscarriage and stillbirth and children born sleeping as being something that you have in private.

So one thing that I'm really proud of our government for is destigmatizing the conversation around mental health. For these women, not only is this a physical health concern, but it's a mental health concern for them, their families, surrogates, their spouses. For certain, I know that the bill put forward by my hon. friend from Sherwood Park encapsulates all of that. It expands that definition, and I think that was something that I was really, really grateful to hear in committee, that we're no longer just thinking of the person who is birthing that child, the mother; we're thinking about, you know, all those people around her, her support system, and what that means.

I actually believe that the Member for Edmonton-Riverview brought that up, about the support people for that person who is experiencing miscarriage and how important that is. Once again, I'm just blown away by the interpartisan, crosspartisan support for this. I think it's phenomenal. I think that one of the most jarring things that I've heard so far in this, you know, is that there are women who legitimately fear that they would lose their job if they asked for this, or families that legitimately feel that they would lose their jobs because of taking time off for bereavement leave. We don't have the same kind of stigma if you lose your mother or father, we don't have the same kind of stigma if you lose a child, for heaven's sake, but for some reason these women do feel that they have to suffer alone and suffer in silence most times.

To hear that approximately 1 in 6 women who know that they are pregnant have a miscarriage and that it's also common for women to have a miscarriage before they even know they're pregnant, that's a jarring statistic.

I think that it's incumbent upon us as legislators to always be thinking creatively about ways that we can support more Albertans, and for me, Bill 220 seems like a no-brainer. I know that we're speaking about it in the concurrence stage, and I know it's pretty far down the Order Paper, but I know that, Mr. Speaker, I personally cannot wait to vote in favour of this bill. I would welcome any amendments. I mean, it's not my bill, but I would welcome any opportunity to expand these definitions to include more women as we grieve for them and as we grieve with them.

I truly believe, Mr. Speaker – and I've said this many times – that a life lost for any reason, any unborn child, for whatever the reason, should be celebrated and should be recognized, so I'm hoping that

education and further conversations like this will help to end the stigma with pregnant women and those who have lost their children, including their families. I hope that today we can all come together in support of Bill 220 and the Member for Sherwood Park.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

I do see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise in concurrence debate on Bill 220, Employment Standards (Expanding Bereavement Leave) Amendment Act, 2021. I just want to echo, I think, the sentiments that have been expressed by all the members of this House about how important this issue is and thank the Member for Sherwood Park for bringing this private member's bill forward and to carry on in that spirit, that this is an issue that we all see value in addressing through legislation.

It's been interesting, of course, to also hear, not surprisingly given the number of us that are in this Assembly, that we've had our own experiences. Either we know people or we've heard stories, or maybe we've experienced pregnancy loss or miscarriage ourselves. I actually put myself in that category, Mr. Speaker, which is that like the 1 in 6, I believe it was, women who have experienced pregnancy loss and miscarriage, I am one of those women. I've had two miscarriages prior to having my first child, my son.

I think it is important to talk about these things. I can tell you from my own personal experience – this was many years ago now. I mean, really, in context maybe not that long ago, but it was about nine years ago. At that time that I had a miscarriage, I had a miscarriage on a Saturday and was in the hospital in the ER all day on that Saturday and went to work on Monday. Even though I spent the Sunday, you know, lying in bed and crying all day long, as did my husband and our family, who, by the way, did not even know – my husband knew. My mother did not know I was pregnant until she came to support me in the hospital during the miscarriage.

I can tell you that it never even crossed my mind that I should not go to work on Monday, and part of that was because I was still shaken at what had happened. It was a pregnancy that we had wanted, that we had tried for. Any woman or person who has suffered pregnancy loss or miscarriage knows that if it's a pregnancy you want, it's such an excitement, this moment where you realize your life is going to change in profound ways that you are deeply excited for and maybe sometimes apprehensive about as well, of course, and then in a second it feels like it's over. There are the physical implications. I certainly was having very strong physical symptoms, but of course it was the emotional devastation.

But I remember I got up for work on Monday, and my husband even looked at me and said: you know, should you even be going to work today? There were two things that made me go to work that day. The first was that I don't think I wanted to accept what had happened. I wanted to just pretend that something was still the same, and I went to work.

But the other reason – and I think it's important to note this – is that I was afraid of telling my employer that I'd had a miscarriage. I was afraid because I didn't want my employer to know that I was trying to have a baby. I was actually worried that that was going to have implications for my work and my job and my career, and I thought: uh-oh; once it's out there that I've had a miscarriage, they'll know that I'm trying to have a baby, and if I'm trying to have a baby, that means that maybe that next project that's coming down the road, they're already thinking about: do they have to hire somebody to cover my mat leave? Am I going to be around for it? Maybe I'll be sick during my pregnancy and won't be able to be there. So I went to work like nothing had happened. I can tell you

that I would say that at the end of that week of work I don't remember a thing I did that week because I was certainly not of the right mind to go to work.

I do think that this possibility of having some kind of leave available might have made a difference although I will say that there is still more work to be done to overcome that stigma that I was worried about. Even, I think, asking a woman to go to her employer and say, "I had a miscarriage," you know, is a deeply personal and private thing, and there are lots of reasons why women would not want to advertise that. I think the idea of a leave is important, but I don't know that we'll fully address some of those concerns. We have bigger issues to address around women's participation in the workforce and how being in child-bearing years, as they say, during certain careers is being held against women. It's holding them back from getting more responsibility and moving on because of a perception about their commitment to their work. That certainly happened to the field that I was in, the legal profession. We have a lot of work to do.

4:50

But I also want to highlight that I come from the enormous privilege of having a job where I probably could have afforded to take a couple of days off with unpaid leave. Honestly, that probably would have been fine for me at that time, but for a lot of women that will be a barrier for them seeking this kind of a leave, that it's not paid, along with the other challenges. I'm heartened to hear that there is some willingness perhaps from the member who brought the bill forward and from this Assembly to consider some amendments. I do hope we get the opportunity to debate this bill in the Legislature and to consider some amendments. I do think we should factor in how much its being a paid leave is going to be significant for a lot of women, women who don't have the ability to take unpaid days off.

I'll just mention that after I had that miscarriage, I had another one two months later. At that point I was so emotionally and physically spent that I did end up taking time off, but I didn't declare once again to my employer that it was as a result of miscarriage. I just took sick leave. Again, I was privileged to have paid sick leave and to be able to do that. The trauma and the experience and strain of going through that both physically and mentally stays with you for a very long time.

I want to acknowledge that there are all kinds of circumstances in which women or persons have miscarriage or have pregnancy loss. In my case I had a loving partner, and we were trying to have a baby, but we know that there are many, many different circumstances and that the feelings and emotions and the psychological effects of having pregnancy loss and miscarriage are going to be different for every woman.

It's not always going to be a sense of losing something you wanted. Let's be clear about that. There are going to be some women who didn't know that they were pregnant and then have a miscarriage, and there will be lots of complicated emotional feelings about that, so I want to recognize that there are many circumstances under which pregnancy loss and miscarriage takes place. I also very much want to echo the comments from my colleagues around how important it is that we consider abortion and termination for medical reasons as part of this leave. I am encouraged to hear comments from government members who have indicated that they would be open to that kind of an amendment. Again, this is not about judgment as to why the pregnancy ended or the loss; it is about, as I understand it, the person experiencing the loss. There are lots of complicated reasons why.

We need to make sure that all those persons who are experiencing this – and I appreciate the recognition of family members who are

supporting. I often feel that my husband – you know, in this situation, as the man, who wasn't the one in the hospital, his emotional journey was somewhat overlooked. In fact, I actually think he carried those pregnancy losses in some ways in a different way than I did and in a more profound way. When I actually became successfully pregnant with my son, I had a sense of peace the entire time. I just knew this was going to be a different pregnancy. I could feel it, so I felt very comfortable and confident in the pregnancy. My husband was terrified the entire pregnancy. He was absolutely terrified, so he carried it in a very different way but in a very real way. So I appreciate that we're considering the circumstances of the person who experienced the loss as well as those around them.

I am open to a very, I think, positive and hopeful debate. I do hope that there is an opportunity to get this forward in this Legislature because I think there is some great consensus within the House right now about the importance of this legislation. I think it is important, too, that we are destigmatizing miscarriage, pregnancy loss, and abortion because these are things that, as I said, nine years ago I was uncomfortable talking about. I didn't even know, by the way, that so many of my friends had experienced the same thing. It was something that we didn't talk about.

The more we do talk about it, the more we can recognize that there are things we can do to support each other through this loss. We can be there for each other, and we can provide real opportunities to think about those people who don't have a lot of the privilege of support systems and of paid leave and of an employer who might understand. Maybe we can develop some fulsome legislation here that can address all those circumstances because it does truly seem as though all of the members of this Assembly are united in that objective, and I look forward to the opportunity to actually make that become legislation that applies to all Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

I see the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon with a couple of minutes remaining.

Mr. Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I won't be taking a whole lot of time, then, but I did want to stand and speak to the concurrence of this bill, Bill 220, Employment Standards (Expanding Bereavement Leave) Amendment Act, 2021. Sometimes very small bills can have very large importance, and I think that this is one of those bills that in a very few short words can speak into the lives of an awful lot of people.

We've had a lot of good conversation today about why we should support this bill, and I'll throw mine in here. Where we've had many of our members speak of their own personal experiences from a female point of view, I can bring one from a male point of view as we suffered a stillborn birth, and I lost a son. I think it's important that we have this conversation. I think that it's important that we consider how we can speak into the lives of individuals that are grieving. I loved the line that you said – and I know I missed a few words here from the Member for Sherwood Park – that we need to recognize and we need to dignify the grief that comes when people experience miscarriage and stillbirths.

I would take the last few minutes or seconds of my speaking time here just to say thank you. Thank you to the member for your consideration. Thank you to the member for bringing forward this piece of legislation. As private members it is a rare honour to be able to stand up and to be able to bring forward good ideas into this Legislature. I believe that this is an idea that, when brought forward, will speak positively into the lives of the citizens of Alberta that, you know, life is full of joy, but it can also be full of grief, and this can help us sometimes at that time of grief, so thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member, and that is phenomenal timing as we have under the standing orders reached the total time for debate on this matter.

[Motion for concurrence carried]

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

Bill 209

Cost of Public Services Transparency Act

[Debate adjourned April 19]

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. members. Are there any members wishing to join debate on Bill 209?

Mr. Dang: I'd like to make a request.

The Acting Speaker: Pardon me?

Mr. Dang: With a request.

The Acting Speaker: With a request? Absolutely.

Mr. Dang: Mr. Speaker, perhaps I would request the unanimous consent of the Assembly, as we are very close to 5 o'clock here, to just call it 5 o'clock and move immediately to Motions Other than Government Motions.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Motions Other than Government Motions

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat has risen.

Agriculture and Economic Recovery

522. Mrs. Frey moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly recognize the critical role of agriculture in Alberta's economy and urge the government to take steps to ensure that Alberta's agriculture and agrifood industries are essential components of the economic recovery plan in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mrs. Frey: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise to speak to Motion 522. I just spent a lot of time speaking to something else, but hopefully this won't make me so emotional.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, it's a rare honour for private members to be able to move a motion, much less have a motion and a bill in the same term. I've been very blessed in the draw, where I was actually able to have not one but two private member's bills with my name on them and now the opportunity to move a nongovernment motion. We are all very blessed as private members to be able to have such an opportunity to be able to speak to matters that are extremely important to us.

For me, throughout the past two years, just seeing the devastation that this province has gone through throughout COVID – many people losing their lives, many industries being completely kicked when they're down, like our oil and gas industry – there has been one industry that has remained victorious throughout all adversity. Recognizing that our farmers have gone through a considerable amount in the last year with unprecedented drought, you know, we really owe a debt of gratitude to our agriculture industry and our

agrifood industry for being there when just about no other industry was able to function.

5:00

I know that early on in the pandemic I had spoken to the Minister of Health at the time to ask for essential status for things like greenhouses, processing plants, meat-packing plants, so on and so forth, to be able to provide that essential service to Albertans which is feeding them, of course, as we know. Not long ago, actually about 45 minutes ago, I had the opportunity to meet with the now Minister of Labour and Immigration alongside friends from Brooks-Medicine Hat and southeastern Alberta. We met with the Alberta Cattle Feeders' Association as well as the Alberta Greenhouse Growers Association to talk about challenges that the agriculture industry is facing in terms of labour now. As somebody who is from southern Alberta I consider myself to be an advocate. I'm a huge fan of our ag industry, so being able to move this motion is extremely important to me today.

We know that before everything else there is agriculture. We had people coming to this land to homestead, to build their lives here, and our agriculture industry has been around since the dawn of time. In Brooks-Medicine Hat specifically, the majority of the riding – I mean, we do have urban contingents in Brooks and the northern half of Medicine Hat, but by and large the riding is mostly farms and ranches. I'm very lucky in that as an MLA you get opportunities to speak in the Chamber, but today is the day where I get to brag about all the good stuff that goes on in my riding. Sometimes it's a humble brag, but today it's not going to be so humble because I'm really darn proud of these people, Mr. Speaker.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Farmers and ranchers are the reason we get to eat every day. I think that's something that we are often so far removed from because, you know, a lot of people will just go into a grocery store, they'll pick up a steak, go home, grill it, and never think about it again. But for some people being able to get that steak to your plate, being able to get that crop from the ground, from seed to crop to the grocery store, that is a process. Without every facet of the industry we would all starve; let's be frank. We are so, so lucky, and that has never been more apparent than through the last 20 months.

The ag industry has faced so many challenges, whether it be drought or labour shortages or just the availability of temporary foreign workers, supply chain issues, which we're now going to see exacerbated because of the tragedies going on in B.C., but one thing that I've noticed over and over again is that our farmers and ranchers haven't asked, really, for anything throughout this pandemic. They don't come knocking on the government door with their hand out. They are asking just to get out of the way and let them do what they do, which is to grow our food, process it, and get it into our bellies. We are all so lucky to have them. You know, I know that every member of this House, we all support the ag industry. I mean, we all eat, so we all should be supporting the ag industry at least.

In the last six months alone this government has made incredible investments into our ag sector. Also, one of those things that we have done is that we've added rural economic engagement and rural economic development to our government as a ministry on its own, or as an associate ministry, to be able to deal with the challenges that we see in rural Alberta and talk about ways that we can enhance life in rural Alberta by creating more economic development and opportunity. We want to show rural Albertans, and I want to show rural Albertans especially in my constituency, that they're not going to be left behind or forgotten by our government.

One of those ways that we can do that is by expanding things like irrigation. We've seen historic investments in irrigation, one just last week. We know that, of course, like I said, there has been a drought in the past year. It's been very hard to get crops off. We've also seen that, you know, yields are not as good as they usually are. Even in irrigated sections they're not quite as good as they should be just because you don't have that natural rainfall and humidity. In Brooks-Medicine Hat we really do rely on water, and we really do rely on irrigation more than most places. So I want to thank the Eastern irrigation district, the St. Mary River irrigation district for all that they do. Just two of the irrigation districts in our province, but they're very near and dear to me because they are in the best constituency of Brooks-Medicine Hat. I know also Cardston-Siksika, Livingstone-Macleod, Taber-Warner are just three of the examples that I could use off the top of my head that also greatly benefit from irrigation.

Initially announced last October as part of the strategy of our government to enhance irrigation infrastructure, there was \$932.7 million to facilitate enhancements in agriculture through irrigation grants. While expanding irrigation infrastructure, this is another 2,000 new jobs and will attract more than \$1.4 billion in new investment by 2023-2024. Those are some big numbers, Mr. Speaker. In fact, they're massive, and it just goes to show the strength of the industry and what it has to offer. These investments can also expand our primary and value-added agricultural exports, which will grow to a projected \$16 billion by 2023, a 37 per cent growth relative to 2019, when we became government.

This expanded investment of nearly half a billion dollars has the potential to expand irrigation by 230,000 acres. That's almost 15 per cent more than what currently exists, and the coolest part about that is that it's happening through advancements in technology. We see things like converting culverts and canals to pipelines, and we are able to do more with less water, which is, of course, extremely important because water licensing remains a very big issue, and of course we don't want to have to use more than we need to get things going.

I have some stats here that say that, you know, this irrigation impact is \$477 million every year to Alberta's GDP and this investment in irrigation will create up to 7,300 permanent jobs and 1,400 construction jobs. That's a really, really, really big deal.

We know, too, that our farmers and ranchers have, like I said, sustained significant challenges. Part of that is things like higher taxes. The carbon tax is adding a huge burden to farmers who are drying grain and also running tractors, running equipment. I'm very grateful to see that the federal Conservatives are working on this and trying to find ways to create more fairness for our farmers.

We also know that we can create jobs by investing in Alberta agriculture. You know, I was just speaking, like I said, with some people and the minister. I have one minute left. Oh, my goodness. I'll speak fast. We have so much opportunity to work with industry to expand what we know about agriculture. It's not just a blue-collar job. There are so many jobs in agriculture, high-tech jobs, jobs that pay extremely well, and I believe that we should really be enhancing our agriculture sector and encouraging people to go and work within it.

To all the farmers and ranchers in Brooks-Medicine Hat, all those who make a living off agriculture – and I would just encourage all members of the House to support those people who've been through a tough year and call on the government to continue to support our agriculture industry and signal to these farmers that we have their back.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Motion 522. Unlike the government, I'm not going to push this to the bottom of the Order Paper. I'm actually going to support this motion because I understand the importance of agriculture and I understand the importance of diversifying our economy and I do believe that it's essential that this government takes action on supporting our agriculture and agrifood industry.

Now, I think one of the concerns that I do have in regard to the comments from the previous speaker is that there weren't actually any comments made about diversification. There were a lot of comments made about irrigation and the investment that both the federal and the provincial government have made in that investment. I don't dispute that that is a good investment. However, the issue with only talking about the importance of irrigation and the investment that this government has made is that that's all this government continues to talk about when it comes to the agriculture industry and the diversification options and investments that can be made.

We know irrigation did support our wetland agriculture producers with drought, but it did not support our dryland producers. In fact, what it did do is completely ignore our producers outside of the irrigation network all the way up north to the Northwest Territories. We've heard from our producers in areas such as Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray, and surrounding areas that their crops mostly failed. Because of that, many of our livestock producers are now facing issues around access to feed, and many of our crop producers are having issues with access to seeds.

5:10

Now, when we talk about agrifood and we talk about investing in agrifood and the fact that this government needs to take a stand and actually start working with our agrifood industry and doing investment, I absolutely agree. We haven't seen that. We saw the previous minister doing an announcement out in Bowden around pulses and a fractionator that is going to be built out there. There is no government support for that facility. In fact, what we have seen is that the very organization that was advocating for more value-add in the pulses industry was defunded by this government, and now there is no voice for the pulses industry when it comes to that value-added production. There is huge potential in plant proteins. We know. The rest of Canada knows. How do we know that? Well, we see Saskatchewan and Manitoba investing significant dollars and supporting those very fractionators being produced and being built in those industries. That is value-added agriculture. That is investing in agrifoods. We haven't seen the government do anything in regard to that and supporting any of those types of value-add industries.

Now, there is other potential when we look at our value-added crops such as our sugar beets. In southern Alberta, in the very area that the hon. member that has introduced this motion represents, sugar beets have the potential to not only do refined sugars, which we know they do – we've got Rogers sugar, who is here, who takes those sugar beets and makes refined sugars out of that – they're in competition with imports of sugar cane, which is a fundamental problem for our markets. They could also take this value-added industry of sugar beets and turn it into things like making sure that we have de-icer on our highways or looking at creating it into lubricants. There is so much potential within that specialty crop alone that his government could be looking at. They could be working with Lethbridge College on some of the research that they're doing. There are many different things that I've asked the

minister about that could be being worked on today that this government has completely ignored.

We saw during COVID that agriculture was our leading economic driver. Absolutely. It could continue to be so if this government actually took the agrifood industry seriously, but we haven't seen them do it. So this motion is very important. It would be great if the minister of agriculture would be listening to the will of the Assembly to acknowledge that we need to start championing our agrifood industry. We export canola, barley, malt, our peas, our lentils, our sugar beets. All of our products in Alberta primarily get exported. Many of them then are exported, refined in other countries, and then we bring them back here, and we buy them. We could be doing that value-added production right here in Alberta.

We know that there is the research facility and the agrifood facility just outside of Leduc. Calgary could have the same thing. In fact, if people wanted to go and do a tour of what's going on in Calgary, we're seeing aquaponics being developed where people are, like, having fish factories, where they're taking that water and then doing indoor farming and growing lettuces and kales and different things, which are then being sold to our local markets. We're seeing a company who has just built a new facility where they're going to be growing indoor strawberries, which is really unique because strawberries are very sensitive to LEDs and not quite happy when they have to be grown inside.

There is substantial opportunity within Alberta. The reality is that the policies that this government has put in place do not support the innovation of those areas. The barriers that have been put in place have prevented investment from actually coming into Alberta. In fact, many of those investors who would like to do the value-add here in the province are in Saskatchewan now or are in Manitoba now, and it's because the environment within Alberta does not support value-added in our province. We are stuck in the old ways, which are: let's export our raw product, let's sell it somewhere, buy it back, and then eat it and have it done here. It's a failure, to be honest, because there are many people who have capital that would like to be investing it in Alberta. We did it when we were in government. We brought Cavendish into the Lethbridge area. We supported that investment because we recognized that our potato crop had huge potential to be used for value-add. Now we have potato chips that are being made, but we also have French fries through Cavendish.

There are opportunities. The plant protein opportunities are abundant, and it doesn't have to be plant protein versus meat protein. It can be both. Alberta can be a leader in both of those. We have a great beef industry here in Alberta. It's one of those things where many people will try to say: well, if you want plant proteins and you want to diversify the economy, then that means you don't like meat. That's not the case, and in fact many people will have a plant protein diet as well as a meat protein diet, and they interchange them all the time. We're seeing many of our chains, like A&W, moving into plant protein alternatives, but they're also selling our hamburgers.

Absolutely, I do support the motion. I would have liked to have seen, though, that instead of continuously hearing from the government – we've heard from the minister last week, again this week. Irrigation is not the only thing that our farmers and ranchers need, and in fact it ignores the majority of the province. It's time for the government to start looking at our central to northern producers, start supporting them, making sure they either have flood mitigation or they have access to drought prevention strategies and not just focus on southern Alberta. Irrigation only supports those who are on irrigated land, and even those that have irrigated land did not necessarily have the support to be able to grow the crops that they needed.

I support the motion, Mr. Speaker. However, I think it could have gone farther, and what we really need to see from this government is for them to finally start to champion the agrifood industry and diversify it so that we can have an even stronger GDP when it comes to our agriculture industry.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock, followed by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, and then we'll see.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today in support of Motion 522, which reads as follows:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly recognize the critical role of agriculture in Alberta's economy and urge the government to take steps to ensure that Alberta's agriculture and agrifood industries are essential components of the economic recovery plan in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat for bringing forth a very important motion, a private member's motion, that we can all rally behind. I myself am an agricultural producer and have been on the farm my entire life. I'm very proud to be in Alberta as an agricultural producer and very excited about the huge opportunities that lie in front of us with this industry. We have an industry that will be here for as long as people are around here, and it will outlast most industries because it is, of course, an industry that we all need.

Albertans know that the agriculture and agrifood industries are essential components of Alberta's economic recovery following COVID-19. They know that the resources that we harvest create the wealth necessary to provide the jobs and services they rely on today while transforming and growing our economy for the future. Despite the impacts of COVID-19 the agriculture and agrifood sector remain vibrant and a significant contributor to Alberta's economy. I want to thank all the producers and all of those that are working within the agricultural industry, whether that's equipment manufacturing, supply of feed products, the processing industry that's processing our ag products, and how they've been resilient through the whole last 20 months.

5:20

In fact, Mr. Speaker, we set new records in 2020 for key indicators on our farm cash receipts: food and beverage manufacturing sales, agrifood exports, and our gross domestic product. I'll just cite some of the numbers that can highlight how the agricultural industry has been able to flourish even in a very difficult time and how that can set us up for success well into the future.

In 2020 Alberta's real gross domestic product for agrifood totalled \$9.7 billion, which was up 5.7 per cent from 2019. While Alberta's overall GDP decreased by 8 per cent in 2020, the agriculture industry's GDP increased by 9 per cent. Alberta's total farm cash receipts reached \$15.4 billion in 2020, the highest on record and up 2.9 per cent from 2019, and accounted for more than one-fifth of the total Canadian farm cash receipts generated from primary agriculture.

That's not all. Food manufacturing sales continued an upward trend and reached a record \$15.5 billion in 2020. In 2020 Alberta accounted for 19.1 per cent of Canada's total agrifood exports, and Alberta's total agrifood exports for 2020 reached a record \$13 billion, which was up 11.7 per cent from 2019. Exports of primary agricultural commodities were up 20 per cent from 2019 to \$6.3 billion in 2020 and accounted for 48.6 per cent of Alberta's total agrifood exports. In 2020 our agrifood industries employed 69,800 Albertans; 42,500 were employed in primary agriculture production and 27,300 in the food and beverage manufacturing industries. This represents 3.3 per cent of Alberta's total employed labour force in

2020 and accounts for 15 per cent of national employment in primary agriculture.

Albertans know transformation is impossible if our core industries such as agriculture suffer, so in alignment with Alberta's recovery plan our government's agrifood sector investment and growth strategy in the Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development department aims to capitalize on the sector's opportunities for growth by attracting more than \$1.4 billion in new investment to create 2,000 new jobs by 2023. We are growing primary and value-added agricultural exports to a projected \$16 billion by 2023, which is a 37 per cent growth relative to 2019, and investing in the modernization and expansion of irrigation infrastructure in southern Alberta, that will add 208,000 acres into irrigation through water savings and water use efficiency.

Through these targets, we aim to grow primary agriculture commodity export by 7 and a half per cent per year and grow value-added agriculture products export by 8 and a half per cent per year. Our government aims to accomplish these goals with a unique approach combining a blend of grant programs, expertise, specialized facilities, product and process development, interim processing, incubation, and business services in a centre-of-excellence model to foster growth and diversification in the agrifood sector.

To this end, Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development facilitated the investment of \$886 million in agrifood sector investments related to 105 projects that led to the creation of 2,128 jobs from April 2019 to March 2021. In addition, Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development is actively facilitating 78 additional investment projects, which have a total potential investment value of almost \$4 billion and are estimated to lead to the creation of more than 2,800 jobs.

Mr. Speaker, we are investing in the modernization and expansion of agriculture. It becomes evident in our irrigation infrastructure expansion by partnering with the Canada Infrastructure Bank and 10 irrigation districts to invest a total of nearly \$933 million in irrigation infrastructure to expand production, create jobs, and spur the province's economic recovery. Through this, our government has committed \$280 million towards the modernization and expansion of irrigation infrastructure in southern Alberta. Together these projects have the potential to expand irrigation by up to 230,000 acres, contributing more than \$480 million annually to Alberta's GDP and creating an estimated 7,400 direct and indirect permanent jobs and over 1,450 construction jobs.

Mr. Speaker, that investment is going to be a generational investment that will prove very important in the production of food for families right across this country but also all throughout the world, and it's important that we recognize the value that that will bring not only for Alberta but for Canadians and for people throughout this world. We know that transformation and growth happens off the strength of industry, and this government has put conditions in place for both our core agricultural production industry and our agrifood processing to thrive, and it is working.

First, our government has streamlined the Canadian agricultural partnership grant, a process to make it easier for producers and food manufacturers to access funds. These changes will allow applicants to receive their money faster, enabling companies to more easily create jobs and inject more money into the province's economy. In addition, our government has developed the new made-in-Alberta-by-Albertans label that farmers and processors can use on their products. The label will help shoppers quickly identify food made in our province when choosing an item at their local farmers' market or the grocery store.

We are also partnering with the Canadian Cattlemen's Association, Alberta Beef Producers, and the Alberta Cattle Feeders' Association to undertake a competitive study.

So, Mr. Speaker, our government has already done a lot to support our agriculture and agrifood industries.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock for sharing some important numbers that really underline how important the agricultural sector is to the overall economy of Alberta.

In my remarks today I want to echo my friend from Edmonton-Manning in highlighting some of the reasons that the government is failing the agricultural industry, and it's made even more egregious knowing that the government members know exactly how important the agricultural sector is. My friend from Edmonton-Manning talked about this government's inaction when it comes to economic diversification in the agricultural sector. I could have talked a lot about this government's destruction of the agricultural research programs overseen by the department of agriculture over the past two years. That has done significant damage to the future development of agriculture in this province and will continue to set Alberta agricultural producers back the longer that that lack of investment and research continues.

I want to focus my comments on the ways that the government is failing to protect the most important thing to farmers and ranchers, and that's a high-quality environment. Mr. Speaker, the government has taken significant actions to put water quality at risk, to put water quantity at risk. It fails to deal with the issue of climate change, and that is going to continue to put producers at risk for generations. Finally, I want to highlight a seemingly small issue but one that could potentially cost millions and millions of dollars if the government doesn't get on top of it, and that is the issue of zebra mussels in irrigation canals.

First of all, with respect to water the Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat has highlighted in her speech the importance of water to agriculture producers. It's not just important to farmers and ranchers in irrigation districts; it's important to farmers and ranchers all across the province. I have yet to meet the farmer who doesn't rely on water to produce his or her agricultural products, but this government has taken one action, one simple action that has put all of our agricultural producers at risk, and that is throwing the door open to mining coal in Alberta's eastern slopes.

5:30

Now, that is a significant risk with respect to water quality because we know that these proposed coal mines have the potential to contaminate all of our water with selenium, that could render our agricultural land much less productive than it is currently. Now, I understand that the minister of environment is doing a little bit of mitigation work, trying to conduct task forces and committees on managing selenium quality. The fact remains, Mr. Speaker, that once the selenium is in the water, there is no way to get it out. The best way to make sure that our farmers and ranchers have water of adequate quality is to make sure that we don't have coal mines in the headwaters that our farmers rely on.

It's also important to note that our farmers have a minimum quantity requirement. The Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat talked about how agricultural yields have dropped this past year because of water shortages. Mr. Speaker, those water shortages will only increase if the government's plans to mine the eastern slopes go forward. We already saw, just earlier in this session, the government twist itself into pretzels to amend my friend from Edmonton-Manning's motion on water issues related to the eastern slopes and, in fact, essentially defanged the motion, changed the

intent so significantly that even though she brought the motion forward, the amended result was so mangled and perverted that we couldn't even vote for it because the government refuses to acknowledge the potential danger that it's causing to water quantity by going forward with its plans to mine coal in the eastern slopes.

If the government is serious about supporting agricultural producers, as they apparently state they are in this motion, then it would immediately ban the mining of coal in Alberta's eastern slopes. Don't fool around with this coal committee, with their deadline extensions and all of these funny games that they're playing. Just pass the Eastern Slopes Protection Act that the Leader of the Official Opposition presented many months ago. That would go a long way to showing agricultural producers that this government actually supports the work they do, because they're concerned about protecting the water quality and water quantity that they rely on to be able to produce our agricultural products.

Further to that, Mr. Speaker, the government needs to get serious about taking action on climate change. Now, my friend from Edmonton-Manning has proposed a significant action with respect to making sure that agricultural producers don't get left behind in the talk about climate change, when governments talk about what actions we can do to mitigate climate change and, in fact, committed to government supports to make sure that agricultural producers can reduce their carbon dioxide emissions by modifying the livestock barns. That's a significant step forward, I think, that the agricultural sector needs.

The fact is that agricultural producers will continue to be at risk unless the world gets climate change under control. We see that happening right now. Next door, in British Columbia, how many billions of dollars are being spent to make sure that agricultural producers can even feed their livestock who are stranded in barns that are surrounded by flood waters, not to mention all of the reconstruction efforts that are going to have to be undertaken once the flood waters have completely receded and the world returns to a state where agricultural producers can go back to work?

Instead, we see a government that continues to roll back climate change mitigation measures. You know, we saw significant changes to the TIER program. That reduced the compliance objective requirements for a number of industrial emitters, making it even less likely that Alberta will contribute to Canada's efforts to mitigate climate change. We see that they cut supports for climate change mitigation measures. You know, the disaster recovery program has been slashed. A whole host of other climate change mitigation plans have been cut or underfunded by this government, so it needs to get its act together when it comes to making sure that the effects of climate change are something that our agricultural producers can withstand.

Finally, they are abandoning the carbon market entirely for agricultural producers. I've had a number of people come forward with concerns that the government is not going to renew some of the carbon offset protocols that farmers already take advantage of to make sure that they have additional revenue streams and can actually stand to make money off Alberta's plans to mitigate climate change. There are \$60 million that have been paid in the last year to agricultural producers in carbon offsets, and the government is just going to throw that out the window, Mr. Speaker. That is shameful.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, is zebra mussels. Now, we know that zebra mussels are imported by watercraft that come in from out of the province, recreate in our lakes and reservoirs that feed into our irrigation system, and if we don't make sure that we do the proper inspections on these out-of-province watercraft, zebra mussels will get into the irrigation system and will cost the province millions and millions of dollars every year to mitigate. [interjection] Exactly. We

cannot afford to let the zebra mussels infest our waterways. All the government has to do is ramp up its inspection programs. In fact, what did we see? Last year, during COVID, they cut their inspection programs almost entirely, and they refused to implement an inspection program that will be effective, actually effective, at preventing zebra mussels from getting into our irrigation systems. The government is good on talk. It needs to follow that up with action, especially on protecting the environment, so that our agricultural producers can rely on the water that they need to make their products.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is absolutely my pleasure to be able to rise today and speak on Motion 522, and I would like to thank my friend and colleague the hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat for putting forth this very important motion. I'd also like to recognize, as this is an ag-related motion, that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar did of course mention what's happening in B.C. I had a chance to see the devastation first-hand recently, and my heart goes out to all the growers in the Fraser valley that are dealing with the devastation of the floods out there. Alberta mourns with them over the tragedies that have beset them these days. Glad to hear that they're receiving lots of support to get through this.

With that being said, I just do want to reiterate that Motion 522 states: be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly recognize the critical role that Alberta agriculture has in Alberta's economy and urge the government to utilize Alberta's world-class agriculture and agrifood industries as key drivers in the economic recovery plan following the pandemic.

Mr. Speaker, as you well know, I feel a very deep level of sentiment for this motion. My family for over a hundred years, actually for five generations, has farmed the same land in southern Alberta. Agriculture is part of who I am. While I knew full well, from the fact that I couldn't make beans grow in grade 2, that it wasn't a career option for me, I'm still very proud to come from a farm family and know the important role that agriculture plays in our communities.

Agriculture certainly is a bedrock of our Alberta economy, and it holds a special place in our province's history and in our culture. As you know, you only need to stop by the Calgary Stampede or, even more importantly, some of our small-town rodeos to see the influence that agriculture has on our province's culture and who we are. Walking through the Stampede grounds, I always find it funny; you can see people from every walk of life, every age, every background, some born in Alberta and others that are born across this beautiful planet, some wearing cowboy hats, some have even got them the wrong way around, I've heard. They're wearing cowboy hats, cowboy boots, and Wranglers. We know in Calgary sometimes that just happens for those 10 days, and they don't get pulled out again for another year. But agriculture is Alberta. The hard and demanding lifestyle that's required of our food producers, our farmers and our ranchers, I think is a very tangible example of the grit and tough and resilient nature of our province and our people.

5:40

Mr. Speaker, you simply cannot have a strong Alberta economy without a strong agricultural industry. Agriculture is a massive part of the Alberta economy. In fact, in 2020 Alberta's real gross domestic product for the agrifood industry totalled \$9.7 billion, with almost 70,000 Albertans employed in that industry. Even as

the pandemic has caused Alberta's GDP to decrease in the last year, the GDP from Alberta's ag industry actually increased by a whopping 9.1 per cent. Alberta's total farm cash receipts reached \$15.4 billion in 2020, the highest on record, and Alberta accounted for more than one-fifth of all total Canadian farm cash receipts that year.

But, Mr. Speaker, this last year has been very difficult on the farmers of our province, and that is particularly true for farmers in southern Alberta. The pandemic has led to many slowdowns through the industry, especially with livestock and meat processing. Our government launched new programs and initiatives to assist with these pandemic-related issues such as the AgriRecovery cattle set-aside program, which was launched in June 2020 to help support our beef producers. The program allowed our beef producers to hold slaughter-ready cattle on a maintenance feed ration, and the program committed around \$12 million last January for this benefit.

The hog AgriRecovery program was another program, developed in March 2021, which was put in place to support Alberta's hog producers to off-set the massive costs associated with the temporary closure of our slaughter plants. There was also an increase to the interim payment under AgriStability from 50 per cent to 75 per cent for the hog and potato industries in the province. We provided rapid test kits to federal meat processing plants to ensure that the staff would be safe and that operations were able to continue on running. In May 2020 we developed a \$5 million agricultural training support program to help employers train new staff and provide \$806,000 in grant funding to agricultural and horticultural businesses, and the government provided a 20 per cent discount on the AgriInsurance premiums for 2021.

But it wasn't just this pandemic that has negatively affected Alberta's beef producers and grain producers. This has been a horrible growing season for many farmers throughout Livingstone-Macleod and across southern Alberta. This year has been unusually hot and dry. Back in March a horrible grass fire decimated cropland near my hometown of Claresholm, towards Carmangay. There are other towns that suffered fires late in March spurred on by the dry conditions and very, very heavy winds. That was even before the record-breaking heat wave that occurred in late June and throughout July hit. These conditions led to many crop failures, and some farmers were unable to seed at all.

Statistics Canada estimated in late August that the total production of select principal field crops in Alberta for 2021 was down over 36 per cent from 2020 and 30.5 per cent lower than the 10-year average. This is off-set somewhat by the large increase in crop prices such as for canola and wheat, which has seen its price increase by 54 per cent between January 1 and the end of September of 2021. Unfortunately, input costs have also increased substantially, straining farmers and their wallets even more.

Mr. Speaker, our government has done a lot to help farmers during these last few years and to expand the industry with investments in irrigation and increasing the value-added processing capacity by growing our exports. Alberta's recovery plan has grown and diversified our agricultural industry, but I do think that more can be done. As we become more urbanized in this province, I think that we sometimes take the ag industry for granted. We see the stocked grocery shelves as a given, and we do not always appreciate the hard work, the back-breaking hours that our farmers put in to the food that we rely on every day. That is why today I think that Motion 522 is an important motion, and I encourage all members of the House to join me in voting in favour of this motion.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon has the call.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be quick here. I rise to speak to Motion 522. I want to focus on one part of the agrifood industry in Alberta and the Alberta recovery plan. It's the industrial hemp sector, really a brand new part of the agricultural economy. Very quickly, industrial hemp is an amazing crop. It'll take five times the amount of carbon out of the air in one year that would take 20 years for a natural forest. It's the strongest natural fibre in the world, and it's incredibly light. Because of that, it has a myriad of applications that I think that we as farmers and Albertans need to consider as we grow the agricultural industry.

We've got companies that are starting to grow industrial hemp. We produce, I think, about 42,000 acres or 40,000 acres of industrial hemp every year across the province of Alberta. In that, we take that crop, and we use it for two basic purposes. The first is for seed, where we can use it for the pharmaceutical industry. We use it as well as the stalk for the agrifood industry. It's the stalk from which we can take the fibre. We can use the long fibre, and we can use the short hurd fibre for a myriad of applications in this province. Right now it's just a very small part of our agricultural sector, but if we play our cards right, I believe that we can grow this into a \$500 million industry very quickly and in a very short period of time.

We have many uses for it. It can go into – one company out of Drayton Valley, BioComposites Group, owned by Dan Madlung, is producing hydroponic grow cubes that you can stick seeds in, and 30 days later, after you go through the hydroponic process, you pull out a carrot or you pull out lettuce. Because it's made out of industrial hemp, it's a hundred per cent biodegradable. Right now they're using rockwool insulation for that, and they've got mountains of the stuff in Europe. A lot of his grow cubes he's selling in places like Holland and Germany. It's a substitute. The small hurd from the stalk can be used for cement blocks. The long fibre can be used for interior door panels for companies like GM and Toyota. It can be used in plastic pellets. It can be used in packing insulation. It can be used in insulation for houses. It's a fibre that has many, many different uses. If we take a look at our Alberta recovery plan, this is a sector of the economy in agriculture that I think we should be considering looking into growing.

I mentioned the BioComposites Group out of Drayton Valley. They started up as a precommercial company when I was first elected in 2015. They now are commercial. The small investment – well, a fairly large investment – in the matting line that they made and started with came from the Alberta government as well as from private sources. Recently the Alberta government invested about \$400,000 into the decorticator or the processing of the industrial hemp that's going to feed that matting line at BioComposites in Drayton Valley. The products that he's making today are selling around the world. It's a real success story as far as really smart investing in a new sector of the economy by this government.

The Alberta hemp alliance was created. I remember talking with one of the members across the way and getting a recommendation that we should have an advocacy group for industrial hemp in this province, so we've worked over the last five years to create the Alberta hemp alliance. Our government invested \$300,000 over three years for the creation of this provincial advocacy group for industrial hemp. Recently I just attended a meeting where they had 40 stakeholders that were looking at: what are some of the provincial impediments to the growing of this industry? We talked about the fact that hemp is not an insurable crop right now. It's got to become an insurable crop through AFSC, and we're going to have to have those conversations. We need to move industrial hemp from the federal health agency, the Ministry of Health, into the agriculture industry, and that would reduce some of the red tape that would allow farmers to continue to grow more and more hemp.

5:50

We've been investing. As the minister of agriculture will attest to, significant time and money are being spent on looking into irrigation down south to increase about 50,000 or 60,000 acres worth of land, prime land that would be really good for an industrial hemp industry. Because of companies like BioComposites we're starting to get the producers that will create the demand for hemp by farmers, and this could be the most profitable crop of any crop we grow when we consider the seed and the stalk of this crop.

You know, we've got companies from around the country starting to look at coming and moving to Alberta, companies like Blue Sky and Inca. I'm going to be doing a member's statement on them here coming up sometime later this week. These two companies are looking at investing and creating a processing plant that could be as much as a \$200 million investment into the Alberta economy should they come to this province, and they're going to be doing some really cool things with it. Blue Sky will be looking at the oils that they can get from the seeds, and Inca is going to be introducing hemp into plastic pellets.

What's really interesting – and I didn't realize this – is that what gives plastic its rigidity is the little glass fibres that they put into the plastic, but those glass fibres break down, and you can only recycle plastic so many times because of the glass fibres. They want to put in industrial hemp fibre, and that will allow the plastic to literally be recycled forever and ever. Amen. That speaks to our recyclable plastic policy that we're starting to develop in the province of Alberta.

They already have companies like Toyota and Winnebago that are looking at purchasing all of the plastic pellets made with hemp that they can get. The farmers are looking at this because, like most entrepreneurs, they want a crop that's going to be not only profitable but is not dependent on foreign, Asian markets or other markets that can shut them down. We can grow this. They have the expertise. We've got the best farmers in the world here.

This is an amazing opportunity, and I want to thank the member for bringing this motion forward so that we can speak to the growth of agricultural sectors of the economy in Alberta. Thank you for your time.

The Speaker: There are just a couple of minutes remaining. The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think there was going to be an arm-wrestling match over on this side of the aisle to talk about agriculture since a lot of us come from those areas, and as old John Denver said once: thank God I'm a country boy. To the Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat: thank you so much for bringing this forward. To the big fellow from Cardston-Siksika – he's a tall man but also has a big heart to let me get up and speak. Again, I didn't want to have that arm-wrestling match with him because I'd hate to make him sad.

The main points in this motion. It calls on the Legislative Assembly to "recognize the critical role of agriculture in Alberta's economy." It calls on the government to take steps to ensure that Alberta's agriculture and agrifood industries are part of the full economic recovery.

I'll tell you what, Mr. Speaker. You know what? When we start talking about economic recovery – and I'm working on this economic corridors task force – we're talking about all of the different economies that we have in the province. As members opposite were talking about different regions, some that were flush with water, some that were despairing without it, talking about some of the agrifood companies that came in, right in this motion – to the Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat, thank you so much for that.

I'd like to point out that Champion Petfoods, a great home-grown success story, started up in Barrhead in . . .

Mr. Smith: My constituency.

Mr. Getson: Your constituency? Well, it is now.

. . . the MLA for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock's country up there. In 1977 this little company starts up. Now it's an international conglomerate. They have one down in Kentucky – that takes care of all of the U.S. market – and it's called DogStar. The one up here that they just set up in the MLA for Drayton Valley-Devon's constituency – I'm going to annex that portion because he has that side of the industrial park; he's got Amazon and he's got Champion; I think I'm going to do a little land play there, take that back to God's country – well, supplies the rest of the market. You know the thing they're stuck on, Mr. Speaker? They can't get enough sheep, they can't get enough chickens, and they can't get enough ducks. Here's an opportunity for us to grow and actually do that.

Part of the equation – the member from Lethbridge was going to be talking about water. In our economic corridors task force we're talking about utilizing those assets. If I'm taking along these corridors and moving process water from pulp and paper, we can move it to the south and water those crops.

The Speaker: Well, I hesitate to interrupt. Here all this time I thought that I was the one who gets to choose who speaks, but clearly it's – pursuant to Standing Order 8(3), which provides up to five minutes for the sponsor of a motion other than a government motion to close debate, I would invite the hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat to close.

Mrs. Frey: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have to say that I've been very grateful to hear all of the conversation around this motion. I know that farmers and ranchers in Brooks-Medicine Hat and around the province are thankful that this entire House is so onside with providing them support and wishing them well.

You know, I wanted to just reflect on some of the comments made by the Member for Edmonton-Manning. I think she made a lot of really, really good points. Unfortunately, I only had 10 minutes to talk, so I didn't really get to everything I wanted to say, but I really do appreciate her elaborating on the fact that agriculture is one of our best sources of diversification for our province. We went through so much in the past two years, and it's just so great for us to be able to support this industry that quite literally gives us the food that we eat.

I also want to just shout out two really amazing organizations in Brooks-Medicine Hat, namely the Canadian Foodgrains Bank and the Prairie Gleaners Society. Both of these organizations are run by volunteers, and just when you thought the ag industry couldn't do more for us, these groups work with producers to set aside crops, to set aside vegetables. Greenhouse producers work with them, the beef industry works with them, and crop farmers work with them. It doesn't matter who. They all work with the Canadian Foodgrains Bank and Prairie Gleaners to be able to provide food for those in our world who may not have food to eat. I would be remiss if I closed today without mentioning them.

You know, we have farmers and ranchers all over this province who deserve our support and recognition every day of the year, not just today, not just in this motion. I know that on behalf of the constituents of Brooks-Medicine Hat who call the agriculture industry their own and call the agriculture industry home I want to just thank every single member of this House, and I would hope that everyone would support me in voting for Motion 522 today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 522 carried]

The Speaker: The government whip.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the Assembly be adjourned until 7:30 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:58 p.m.]

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