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The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

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Day 130

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

10 a.m.

Tuesday, November 23, 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.

Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 80

Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2021 (No. 2)

[Adjourned debate November 16: Mr. Nicolaides]

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore has the call.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good morning to you, and thanks for the opportunity to rise and add some initial comments from myself as critic on the Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2021 (No. 2). It feels like it should be, like, No. 3 or No. 4, and I'll explain that probably in a minute.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I have to be honest. I had some unrealistic expectations. I thought: we have a new associate minister of red tape. The Premier, of course, has been shuffling the deck chairs around, and I remember what he said when he was doing all that. He said: it's time for a fresh perspective. You know what? I'm all for that. A fresh perspective: that sounds great. Then, of course, Bill 80 shows up, and I guess that's where my expectations were dashed because it seems like this bill is just like all the other red tape bills. It's a very interesting attempt, shall we say, to try to justify to Albertans why the government needs to spend 10 and a half million dollars over the course of the term doing this when, clearly, ministries are able to do this all by themselves. I was hoping for a little bit more. Sadly, I guess that's not the case.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I was a little critical of the former associate minister of red tape. I was always, I guess, kind of badgering a little bit, saying: did you actually believe, when you were in opposition, that omnibus legislation is bad? I kept seeing omnibus legislation coming forward in red tape reduction bills. I've decided that there's just no point to that anymore. Clearly, those sentiments that were expressed in the 29th Legislature were a bunch of baloney. It is what it is. Clearly, the UCP likes omnibus legislation. It just means that should they change, which I expect them to in 2023, they won't get to credibly complain about omnibus legislation going forward because they've used it quite clearly, just like they have in this current Bill 80. We have about nine different acts crossing six different ministries.

I wouldn't say that there are some unexpected changes within the bill. I mean, we've seen changes across the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act; the Human Rights Act; the Credit Union Act; the fiscal sustainability act; the Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis Act; the

Income and Employment Supports Act; the Insurance Act; the Loan and Trust Corporations Act; the Mines and Minerals Act; and some minor grammatical changes, technical changes through the Education Act, the Human Tissue and Organ Donation Act, the Public Service Act, the Seniors Benefit Act. That sort of gets me to wonder. To start with some of the first ones, some of these minor changes, grammatical and technical changes, through some of the last ones that I mentioned: are those really red tape reduction, Mr. Speaker? I think not.

When I think of things like the, you know, over 4,300 small businesses that haven't yet received the third instalment of the SMERG funding, that sounds like there's some significant red tape that needs to be cut right there. Why aren't we focusing on that? I mean, we can, clearly, get somebody to do some grammatical changes, technical changes, throw that into a statutes amendment act, done – no problems whatsoever – yet these businesses are still waiting for money to try to keep themselves afloat.

I think about the over 4,600 businesses that were denied for unjust reasons when they applied for SMERG funding, for silly reasons like they didn't use the proper web browser. Now, let's be honest, Mr. Speaker. If that's not red tape, I don't know what is, that a simple browser gets you denied or because you didn't actually submit your paperwork within the time that somebody was in an office but still on the same day. Given everything that's going on in the pandemic and the struggles that businesses are going through, that's the excuse that's used to deny these people funding and to help their small businesses and medium-sized businesses. That sounds like some red tape that needs to be addressed.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I said that I wouldn't pick on the former minister, and perhaps I might. I'm hoping that the current associate minister won't be doing things like, I don't know, handing out plaques to his colleagues or – I don't remember what the actual figure was; it was something like \$90 or something like that – to buy a pair of scissors and some red tape to go and cut red tape all over the place and talk about how great that is. Or, for instance – and perhaps somebody can correct me; I can't remember if it was saving Albertans \$5 or \$10 from cutting their Christmas trees, yet they still had to fill out the registration form to do that. Hopefully, we won't see some things like that coming forward with the new associate minister.

Now, one of the things that I brought up in question period – and I have yet to actually have it confirmed – one of the changes contained in Bill 80 is to move the insurance premiums act into the Alberta health care act. On the surface, of course, that doesn't necessarily look like a bad thing. You're simply taking one act and moving it over there. Now, do we want to classify that as red tape reduction? I mean, really, we're talking about instead of reading it on the left side of the table, we're going to read it on the right side of the table. You know, I think that's a little bit of a stretch.

But, I guess, at the same instance, when you're trying to justify 10 and a half million dollars, you better look like you're doing something; otherwise, people are going to start to ask: well, why do we – actually, you know what? They're already asking that. They've been asking that since day one. Why do we need a separate, stand-alone ministry to do something that could be just driven out of the Premier's office as a policy? But I suppose I see that there could be a stumbling block there because – oh, I don't know – perhaps the Premier goes on vacation. Then who's going to be around to drive that red tape reduction strategy? I suppose that's a risk that people didn't want to take.

Getting back to moving the premiums into the health care act, I asked: is this some kind of a precursor to having health care premiums reintroduced to the province of Alberta? When I asked this in question period, I didn't get an answer from the Minister of

Treasury Board and Finance, I didn't get an answer from the Minister of Health, and I didn't get an answer from the red tape minister either. I mean, if you're not going to bring back health care premiums, a simple no would have sufficed. The conversation about it would have ended literally there, which wouldn't give me a whole lot to criticize on that except for a cut-and-paste job. I would be very, very interested to know and Albertans have told me they'd be very interested to know: is there something else coming forward? If there isn't, I think a simple "No, that's not going to happen" will suffice and end it right there.

10:10

You know, we've seen some changes with the Alberta Human Rights Act, and I know that there are some significant challenges there in terms of hearing cases. Really, what it's going to come down to is providing the resources to be able to hear those cases in a timely manner, but I suspect that may be a bit of a challenge because we've consistently seen the government go after the people that can least afford those kinds of things.

Like I've seen in previous red tape reduction legislation that's been tabled, we see this I think I referred to it as fluff, you know, where we're changing some grammar, maybe doing little technical changes, stuff like that. It kind of looks like hand-me-downs from other ministries. Then, you know, we do see some changes that I don't necessarily have a problem with. Certainly, I think it provided a more streamlined approach to some things. But then we also couple it with at least one piece of legislation that is clearly, clearly not in the best interests of Albertans. True to form, as I said earlier, I had some expectations that were, unfortunately, crushed.

In Bill 80 we see changes to the Income and Employment Supports Act. I have a significant problem with this. First of all, why isn't this piece of legislation being driven by the minister? We've seen some significant pieces of legislation that have come forward that really should have been driven by the ministries. You know, reporters would ask questions about these pieces of legislation, and all we'd get is finger pointing: well, talk to that minister, and talk to that minister. It kind of reminded me of a scene from *The Wizard of Oz*, pointing in every other direction. If you don't know the answers, then you shouldn't be bringing forward the legislation.

This is designed, I believe, to allow for the situation to, I guess, come up with an excuse to take somebody off these supports. It amends sections 6, 10, and 11 of the Income and Employment Supports Act to require that members of a household eligible for income and employment supports as full-time learners must be accepted in an approved training program that commences before April 1, 2022, which is not very long from here. The date alone tells me that there's been a finish line established and that for anything after that, well, too bad, so sad for you. That's kind of the attitude that it feels like. When we see these changes that are affecting our most vulnerable populations, it kind of feels like the sentiment coming back from the government is: sorry; too bad, so sad. Essentially, this means the full-time learner stream for income support will no longer exist.

So what's the plan? You know, we want to be able to give individuals the chance to retrain, possibly look at different careers if their current income stream has either been interrupted or has simply disappeared. Again thinking back to all these small and medium-size businesses that can't even get their third instalment – and we're well into the fourth already – I have some very, very significant concerns around this. It'd be very, very interesting to see what kind of a response we start to get around this. I have to ask: why is this change being, quite frankly, hidden in a red tape reduction bill? Why can't the ministry just be up front with this and

drive it themselves? I have to ask why the Minister of Advanced Education, for instance, isn't addressing this with us; certainly, there's been ample opportunity to do so. There have been claims, of course, that this will reduce barriers for Indigenous . . .

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-East has risen.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand to speak on Bill 80, the Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2021 (No. 2), which I support. Bill 80 will help Albertans cut through red tape, save time, money, and, most importantly, enhance the lives of Albertans. First and foremost, I want to express my gratitude to the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction for bringing this vital piece of government legislation forward. Bill 80 focuses on three major areas for red tape reduction: economic growth and job creation, sensible regulations, and better government service delivery.

Mr. Speaker, if this bill passes, job creators and Albertans will benefit from the removal of unnecessary barriers to economic growth, including more economic opportunities for small businesses that are faster and more efficient, review of human rights complaints, and more flexible oversight of Alberta's credit union and insurance industries, all of which will save money and time. Bill 80 makes important amendments to nine separate pieces of legislation across six departments, with a goal of reducing red tape, creating jobs, and helping to grow Alberta's economy while maintaining smart regulations. Bill 80 will eliminate at least 870 regulatory requirements in legislation, rules, policies, and forms, putting us one step closer to our target of reducing red tape by one-third by 2023.

To date Alberta's government has eliminated almost 120,000 regulatory requirements and has reduced red tape by over 18 per cent. Since the beginning of the mandate, the government has been able to eliminate approximately 3,300 needless requirements in government legislation, rules, policies, and forms. Through the past passage of five red tape reduction implementation bills and given COVID-19's fiscal implications, it is vital that we make it as simple as possible for businesses to operate, create jobs, and propel Alberta ahead. These efforts have shown much fruit as new investment and jobs continue to flow in Alberta. We will continue to reduce unnecessary, overly burdensome regulatory requirements to support Alberta's economic recovery.

Mr. Speaker, reducing unnecessary red tape is a key part of Alberta's recovery plan to create jobs, encourage investments, and recover the economy. Recently the Northern Petrochemical Corporation announced plans to build a \$2.5 billion major petrochemical facility near Grande Prairie. This carbon-neutral ammonia and methanol production facility will create over 4,000 construction jobs and 400 employment opportunities to continue to contribute to further diversification of Alberta's economy.

10:20

Through advantages like the low corporate tax rate, reduced red tape, and the Alberta petrochemical incentive program, Alberta is quickly becoming a global leader in petrochemical investment and production. Shell Canada's refinery complex recently announced plans to build a large-scale solar installation in Alberta's Industrial Heartland. Amazon Web Services chose Calgary, Alberta, as their location to build a second Canadian hub. This will be the largest tech-sector investment in Alberta's history, at \$4.3 billion, and will create a thousand jobs. Dow Chemical announced plans to build the world's first net zero carbon emissions ethylene complex in Alberta. This will be the largest private-sector investment to happen in Alberta in decades, reaching upward of \$10 billion and creating thousands of jobs.

These are only a few examples of the recovery plan's effectiveness in Alberta. The government is boosting Alberta's competitiveness by keeping low taxes and reducing red tape, resulting in increased investment and growth across the province. As a result, with the addition of 9,000 full-time jobs in Alberta, Alberta's unemployment rate plummeted to its lowest level since 2020.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 80 makes various measures to eliminate red tape from various legislation. To improve the economic growth and create more jobs, amendments will be made to the following acts: the Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis Act; the Mines and Minerals Act; the Credit Union Act; the Loan and Trust Corporations Act; the Public Service Act; and the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act. As well, to improve service and delivery, changes are being made to the Alberta Human Rights Act and the Income and Employment Supports Act.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's government is changing cannabis and liquor laws to cut red tape, improve revenue and growth prospects, and allow consumers greater choice and access to products while maintaining strong public health and safety standards. This includes improvements that encourage economic growth by allowing communities to create entertainment zones, which are designed public spaces where adults can drink responsibly. Entertainment districts can help to rejuvenate neighbourhoods, boost tourism, and assist small and local companies.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans will now be able to drink home-brewed beer, wine, and cider at private, nonsale events like weddings and family reunions, removing an unnecessary restriction. By entering the online cannabis market, licensed cannabis retailers will be able to expand their operations, and this is augmented by enabling the selling of additional products such as merchandise at cannabis stores, which will provide these Alberta businesses with more revenue prospects.

Mr. Speaker, changes to the Mines and Minerals Act will ensure appropriate administration of Crown mining agreements by making it easier for leaseholders to dismiss a designated representative for their agreement if the representative fails to fulfill their obligations. This will benefit Alberta's oil sector by reducing expenses for leaseholders, who will no longer have to go to court to replace a designated representative as necessary, and ensuring that agreements are not stranded and cancelled. The revisions will allow the minister to replace a designated representative who has abandoned their responsibilities, resulting in administrative efficiency for petroleum and natural gas tenure agreement holder leases. This would ensure that lease agreements are appropriately maintained in the future, avoiding a more costly replacement process that would require a court order.

The Alberta Insurance Council and the Accreditation Committee will be given fee-setting authority under the amendments, which would allow the minister to determine fees related to the regulation and licensing of insurance professionals. The modification enables more flexible insurance industry regulations by allowing costs to be altered more quickly in response to changing circumstances such as educational and licensing requirements.

The consultation with stakeholders revealed that the government needs to reduce red tape, make the insurance industry regulations more effective and responsive.

Again, Mr. Speaker, the changes will allow the Alberta Insurance Council and the Accreditation Committee to adjust fees directly, with appropriate ministerial oversight, to better accommodate annual surpluses or deficits and respond to changing licensing examination structures, allowing for more flexible oversight of the insurance industry.

The Alberta Health Care Insurance Act will combine key aspects of the Health Insurance Premiums Act, allowing the former to be abolished while the legislative framework is streamlined and simplified. This revision will combine all Alberta health care insurance plan laws into a single piece of legislation, making it easier for Albertans to locate the rules and the information of the AHCIP in one place.

We are following through on a public promise to engage in more consultation with health care professionals in order to build the best possible implementation plan for the practitioner ID system, which will require new physicians to apply for a sub ID number.

Mr. Speaker, revisions to the Alberta Human Rights Act will allow Albertans to register complaints or respond to complaints with the Alberta Human Rights Commission electronically, saving time and money. Additionally, revisions will eliminate needless layers and interim procedures in the complaint process, allowing the commission to access and hear complaints in a speedier and less formal manner, lowering backlogs and wait times. Additional revisions will eliminate redundant layers in the complaint processes, resulting in shorter complaint resolution times and more access.

Mr. Speaker, with changes to the Income and Employment Supports Act, adult learners applying for financial aid for programs beginning on or after April 1, 2022, will be assessed under the Student Financial Assistance Act and will be able to take advantage of the act's new simplified eligibility criteria, which include a streamlined application process and fewer barriers for Indigenous students and sponsored immigrants.

In the beginning of April 2022 students applying for financial aid will be evaluated under the new foundational learning assistance regulations under the Student Financial Assistance Act, SFAA, which establishes simplified eligibility criteria, streamlines application processes, removes barriers for Indigenous students and sponsored immigrants, and clarifies the programs in which eligible students must enrol. Reduced processing times are projected to help students, in particular, down from eight weeks to one to three days, and the number of customer calls will drop from 46,000 to 10,000 each year.

Through the improvements to the government's regulatory oversight authorities, the Alberta government is streamlining support for the financial services industry, improving consumer protection.

10:30

By combining regulatory control of the credit union system, Treasury Board and Finance will be able to make better use of existing resources. Other amendments to the law will provide the government more latitude in overseeing loan and trust corporations as well as allow for the quicker dissolution of unregistered and inactive amendments and would give the Credit Union Deposit Guarantee Corporation legislative authority to take over the management of Alberta's central banking facility, CUDGC. As well, Mr. Speaker, the minister will also be able to appoint the CUDGC to oversee loan and trust organizations and other provincial agencies.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others wishing to join the debate? I see the hon. Member for St. Albert has risen.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise to speak to Bill 80, Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2021 (No. 2). A number of my colleagues have touched on some of the other pieces of legislation that are being opened up and changed in

this red tape reduction act. Let's be honest. You know, this is everything but the kitchen sink shoved into one bill. If you look at the amount of time that we have to actually debate this bill, it's very sad. There's a reason that this government is doing this again. I don't know how many times they've done this, shoved all kinds of things – this is actually, now that I think about it, how AISH and income support were deindexed. These benefits were deindexed via an omnibus bill very much like this. Shame on this government for doing it again.

I would suggest that if this government is proud of their vision for the future and for the people that live in poverty or are unemployed in this province, they have the courage to stand up and do so in the light of day, not hiding it in a bill of red tape reduction and acting like there's no problem.

I'd like to point out to this Chamber what some of the problems are with this particular piece. I'm going to be focusing my comments on income support, the Income and Employment Supports Act, the changes that are being made. One of the things that is happening – you know, at first glance, it doesn't look too bad. It looks like, well, it's just that this legislation is being changed and adding some eligibility. The previous member talked about: oh, yeah; this is great; we're just clarifying eligibility.

What it has done in a really backhanded way is say that everything after April 1, 2022 – so if you're eligible for income support and you want to do a program like a learner program after April 2022, you're out of luck. This is a way for this government to stop benefits for people who are on income support in one category specifically, expected to work. They will no longer be eligible for these legislated supports. Not only is that sneaky, but it is going to have an extraordinarily negative impact on people's lives.

I just want to spend a minute and explain to the members in this Chamber because, you know, I think it's really important that you understand what you're voting on and what you're doing. Income support is almost like – I think of it as a step below AISH. The core benefits are at least or less than half of what AISH recipients get. Now, the only way that people have been able to survive on income support is because there have been layered on different supplemental benefits. One of the larger ones that I've been talking about repeatedly for months is the accommodation supplement, and that was about \$300 that allowed people to actually find a place to live. Now the government is systematically removing that.

The two categories of income support are expected to work and barriers to employment. Barriers to employment: that's where you would find a lot of Albertans sitting who have not yet applied for AISH, who have maybe been declined, who are in the process of appealing, or are just unaware that they can apply for AISH. They have significant barriers to competitive employment. That amount, that core benefit, is under \$900.

The other category is expected to work. This is a different category of people, and their barriers are not as significant as the people in the other section of income support. In fact, some of these folks will be working, so within the expected to work category there are a few different ways to define. There are people that are working, there are people that are available for work, and there are people that are unavailable for work. Unavailable for work could be that they're already in a training program, or perhaps there's a medical issue, all of those things.

Now, I looked at the government's open data just to get a sense of what the numbers were like – how many Albertans are we talking about here that will be impacted? – and the most recent entry into the open data comes from August 2021. Keep in mind that this number has gone down significantly during COVID. I would suggest that approximately it's gone down about 20,000 people during COVID, and that is because of the different federal benefits

that were available to people. But as of August 2021 we know that there are over 41,000 Albertans that are receiving this income support benefit.

Out of this group, so in August, we know that expected to work, available for work was almost 14,000 people. So let's say that it was just that category of people or just that small group out of the entire number; that is 14,000 Albertans that will be impacted by this legislative change. What that means – and for those of you that don't know, income support, again, the core benefit, is not much, but that is what allows people to get through, and to qualify for this benefit, you pretty much have to be destitute. This small core benefit allows people to survive when they don't have things like employment insurance, they don't have savings, and they don't have someone to help them out. They just have nothing. This is a core amount that allows them, hopefully, to have a place to stay, to have some food, to perhaps buy a bus pass, get some gas until they can find employment. We traditionally called this welfare for years and years. We can get into a whole debate about the words that we use, but that's what this is. It allowed people to survive until they could make things better.

One of the categories in income support, expected to work, was this training. There are a number of different training programs that allow people that have really struggled to maintain, find, or keep employment. This allowed them to maybe upgrade, to learn new skills, to have a new opportunity. Something like an apprenticeship would be ideal, and it allows people a new opportunity to do that. That was great. While they were in training, they had the income support to be able to finish the training and not have to leave to go find a job to be able to, you know, earn some money to buy food. What this legislative change does is that anybody after April 2022 in this particular category: you're done. That is what you're doing. That is what this government is doing. You're going to stand up and crow about the benefits of this red tape reduction bill, and what you are doing is making life increasingly difficult for a large number of Albertans that are already struggling. They are already struggling.

This government, Mr. Speaker, has systematically made poverty in Alberta worse. It's just mind-boggling to me that they cannot understand what the cost of poverty is. It's just mind-boggling to me. They have deindexed benefits to some of the poorest people in our province: people with severe disabilities, people with chronic mental illness, people with stage 4 cancers that are on AISH, people with chronic health conditions, people with significant barriers to employment. I'm not talking that they recently lost a job; I'm talking in many cases decades of chronic unemployment or inability to maintain a job. These are the poorest people in this province, and this government has systematically – systematically – set out to make life worse, increasing the poverty that we see in this province and then crowing and tapping themselves on the back when they invest a few million dollars back into grant programs that are going to make life better for Albertans when they have systematically for two years increased poverty in this province. This small change in a large piece of legislation, that is innocuously called red tape reduction, is going to make life very difficult for a group of people.

Now, before we broke for the constituency break, I can recall being in this Chamber on a morning shift and having the Minister of Advanced Education stand up and speak to comments similar to the ones that I'm making right now and sort of flick this aside and say: "Ugh, just fear and smear. It's fearmongering. Really, it's just all going to come under Advanced Education. Everything is going to be just fine. I don't know what they're worried about."

10:40

Well, a couple of things, Mr. Speaker, that I'm worried about is that this is the least trusted government in Canada. I don't trust what

they say. I don't trust what they do. I have seen repeatedly that they have said: "Oh, no, no. Trust us. It'll be fine." Well, show the evidence. If indeed this is the fact, how much money is being transferred? How much will people receive as a core benefit when they are in training? How about people that come after April 2022? What are the answers? What are those answers?

So you have a minister that'll stand up and say, "Oh, no; it's okay; we've got it covered; we're going to cover this," but, Mr. Speaker, sadly, I don't buy it. For that reason, I would like to move an amendment.

The Speaker: Hon. member, if you could just pass it along to the page, and once we have it through to the table, I'll ask you to proceed.

Hon. members, this amendment will be referred to as REF1. Please proceed.

Ms Renaud: Okay. I move that the motion for second reading of Bill 80, Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2021 (No. 2), be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 80, Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2021 (No. 2), be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

Mr. Speaker, I think that, you know, just prior to introducing this amendment, I was talking about just the poverty in Alberta and the cost of poverty. I mean, we all know that inflation is a reality right now. Prices are going up. Even if you don't buy what I'm saying about increasing poverty in Alberta, we all know that we're paying more at the grocery store. When I used to go and spend about \$100 for groceries, I know that I'm paying more. We all know this. We have to know this. Insurance has gone up. All kinds of costs have gone up, and benefits for people that don't have the means to support themselves any other way continue to go down. This piece of legislation is going to increase the problem, make it more difficult for people to support themselves and their children. I would like to remind this Chamber that it is not just single Albertans that receive the income support benefit, but a great deal of them are actually single parents.

I think that, you know, I like to hope that members opposite are thoughtful and actually do listen to debate and enter into debate knowing that they are not perfect, that it is possible for them to make mistakes, and that when they hear that there is a way to correct it and to actually make it better, they will take that. Mr. Speaker, I am very hopeful that the members opposite will understand that this little change in legislation has the potential to devastate thousands of Albertans who rely on this benefit to get them through some of the most challenging, difficult times of their lives, when they are not working, when they are looking for training to find work so that they can once and for all get off this benefit, support themselves, and support their families.

It's my sincere hope, Mr. Speaker, that referring this bill to a committee, although it's not a perfect system, to Resource Stewardship, would allow us to actually do what I have no doubt the government failed to do, and that is to consult the actual people who will be impacted by these changes.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that I am wrong. I hope that government members, somebody, will stand up and say: "No, no. We consulted. We actually spoke to Albertans who rely on income support or who rely on income support so that they can do this training. We absolutely did that. We didn't just talk to friends and lobbyists. We didn't just talk to the people who aren't going to be impacted by the monthly changes to the income support benefit. We spoke to people

who would be impacted." It is my sincere hope that this government stopped and thought about: what are the potential implications for a change like this? Even if it's only 10,000 Albertans that are impacted, is this really what you want your legacy to be, that you increased poverty? Under your watch you made things extraordinarily more difficult for Albertans, during a public health crisis I might add.

Mr. Speaker, it is my sincere hope that the members opposite will actually think that, you know, we didn't come to this place – I like to think all of us came to this place to make positive change and to be there for all constituents and to do our very best to represent them and to do the right thing by Albertans. I'm telling members, in my limited capacity of what I know about income support and the people that rely on income support, that this will devastate people, not right away, after April 2022, but it will devastate people.

If, in fact, I'm incorrect and this is simply a transfer from one ministry to another, which I don't believe it is, if in fact this is simply a transfer, as the Minister of Advanced Education would like us to believe, then I would love to hear from a government member: how much money is being transferred from Community and Social Services to Advanced Education to cover the living expenses of Albertans who are in training?

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has risen.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to speak in favour of this amendment, REF1, concerning Bill 80. It is, in essence, just really asking members of this Assembly not to support it being read a second time. Certainly, I concur with my colleague from St. Albert, who spoke and brought forward this amendment on Bill 80, Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2021 (No. 2).

Mr. Speaker, certainly, this government has from the outset decided that they want to earnestly reduce red tape in legislation. You know, I don't have any difficulties with that, but I think what we're seeing here in this bill and what we've seen in other bills is not really red tape reduction. It's more an attack on some very significant and important public programs that make a significant difference in people's lives in our province. It's kind of a bit of a hidden agenda that the government has with this and just the way the legislation is brought together.

Certainly, I remember very clearly, when we were in government, how much umbrage the opposition took with sort of omnibus bills like this, when several pieces of legislation are just kind of squashed together in one bill. This bill is quite literally a book. I mean, it had to be bound; it's so many pages. That takes a little bit more time to debate it. Really, it should be separated out into the sections and really called what it is, and the legislation that they're wishing to change should be in the areas that are responsible for it, like Advanced Education, for example, with the cutting of the Alberta learner income support program and the skills investment bursary.

10:50

I do want to talk just a little bit more about – I guess, I feel like it's almost like a talking point for the UCP with their base that, of course, government is bad. That's the thing. There's this belief system, I think, with sort of a neoliberal belief system. That, of course, is that, you know, everything the government does can be done better by the private sector, so we must cut government. Red tape is kind of part of that whole narrative, which this bill is looking at. We see it in many of the bills the UCP puts forward. Certainly, the UCP has put forward Bill 78 on an amendment to affordable

to absolutely harmful, incredibly damaging legislation. I would categorize Bill 49 as landing closer to the mostly useless end of the spectrum of the legislation, and that's why I think I'm going to speak in favour of this legislation. I don't really think that anything that's contained in the legislation will harm or in any way set Alberta back, but I really don't think that this piece of legislation addresses the urgent problems that are facing the province of Alberta right now.

You know, as I have said in debate, I think that with every piece of legislation we've seen brought forward to this House since March 2020 – we're in the midst of the worst health crisis and the worst economic crisis in the history of the province, and the government continues to fiddle, I think, while Rome burns behind it. That's what we see here in Bill 49.

Now, it's the stated intent, I guess, of the government that by passing this piece of legislation, they're going to somehow spur some kind of economic redevelopment in the province of Alberta, economic redevelopment which is urgently needed at the time. You know, I don't need to remind everybody – well, actually, no, maybe I do because hearing statements from government ministers, government backbenchers lately indicates that they really have no clue what's going on when it comes to the economy of Alberta. We hear statements from them daily about things apparently turning around and that people are going back to work in numbers that should be celebrated when, in fact, the actual truth is the complete opposite, Mr. Speaker. We see that we haven't yet reached prepandemic employment numbers, and it's a question as to whether or not the government will do anything to spur employment in this province.

We still have the highest unemployment rate of any of the provinces west of the Atlantic provinces in the country, and the government continues to do absolutely nothing to change this state of affairs. I don't think Bill 49 here as presented will do anything to change that state of affairs either. Now, you know, we hear the government members say that it's all of these regulatory hurdles that professionals have to overcome to move to Alberta that prevent them from moving to Alberta and coming to work here and contributing to our wonderful province, but I think they've got the problem exactly backwards. There are no jobs for professionals to move to Alberta for, Mr. Speaker. As I've said, we've got the highest provincial unemployment rate of any province west of the Atlantic provinces.

More concerning than that, Mr. Speaker, we see that for the first time in decades people are moving out of the province in greater numbers than they are moving in; 2020 was the first year, I think, in almost 30 years that more people left the province of Alberta than actually moved into the province.

Why did they leave, Mr. Speaker? Well, there are a whole host of reasons that I could submit, but I think one of them is the fact that the employment situation is as bad as it's ever been. People cannot find work right now in this province, and the government is doing absolutely nothing about it. You know, what was most concerning to me about the recent unemployment statistics that Statistics Canada released at the beginning of the month was that not only have we failed to restore the number of people working to prepandemic levels and not only is our unemployment rate the highest in the country west of the Atlantic provinces, but tens of thousands of people continue to drop out of the workforce. They've given up hope that they can even find a job, so they're not even showing up in the statistics. This bill will do absolutely nothing to address that.

You know, it's very concerning to me, Mr. Speaker, that this government has driven the economy into the ground to the point where people are leaving in droves. Now, I certainly remember as a child that Alberta was the place that people in other parts of

Canada wanted to move to. My friend from Edmonton-Mill Woods gives me a hard time about how old a man I am, and I'll age myself here. I remember distinctly Ian Tyson singing about moving out to Alberta. He had a friend that he could go working for out here, apparently. Well, nobody has friends that they can come working for in Alberta. Now, Neil Young, I understand, also recorded that song. He's probably not the most popular artist among government backbenchers, but he also recorded that song. Gordon Lightfoot sung about being Alberta bound.

Mr. Neudorf: Hear, hear.

Mr. Schmidt: I hear the Member for Lethbridge-East saying, "Hear, hear." Well, people aren't Alberta bound anymore. In fact, they're packing up their bags and leaving.

Now, I will apologize to my friends from Edmonton-South and Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. I don't have a more contemporary example for them. The best that I can come up with is a song that Big Sugar recorded in the early '90s.

Mr. Dang: The early '90s?

Member Irwin: Thomas was not with us.

Mr. Schmidt: Yeah. Exactly.

They talked about how they've heard about a heaven in Alberta, where they've got all hell for a basement. Well, this government has done everything in its power to leave nothing but the basement of Alberta exposed, Mr. Speaker, and I fear that the damage that the government has done has been so bad that my friends from Edmonton-South and Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood may never know a time when Canadian singers sing about the wonders of moving to Alberta.

Member Irwin: You can allow . . .

Mr. Schmidt: Oh, I know. I see the associate minister wanting to rise. I would recommend that he won't be in that seat for much longer so he should probably sit in it and enjoy it while he still has it.

The Speaker: I'd just perhaps interject briefly. With respect to the interjection process there are polite ways to say no to an interjection, and there are ways that are not polite and perhaps bordering on unparliamentary. I think that given that this is a new process of the Assembly and I believe most members want the interjection process to work well and increase the level of decorum, I might just provide some caution to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar that if he'd like to say no, he do so in a respectful and meaningful manner.

11:10

Mr. Schmidt: Well, Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate that caution. As you rightly noted, this is a new process for all, and I'm trying my best to make it work as well as it can for everybody involved. I will take your words to heart. Thank you.

As I was saying, though, the province of Alberta is in a very serious economic situation, and we see people leaving by the thousands because there is no work here. The problems run even deeper than that, Mr. Speaker, because not only is there no economic opportunity here in the province for many of the professionals who will be impacted by this piece of legislation; the economic opportunities that are available aren't desirable to other people from out of province for a whole host of reasons.

I understand that health care professionals, you know, would probably give a second thought to whether or not they would move

to the province of Alberta given the way that this government has treated them, not just in piling on the added demands of letting the COVID pandemic spiral out of control to the point where the health care system is collapsing but in continuing to devalue the work that health care workers do when it comes to being quite disrespectful in negotiations with doctors, for example, threatening layoffs at one point – right? – still refusing to say their plans for the future, should this pandemic ever end, what the fate of thousands of health care workers will be. What kind of health care professional would look at the province of Alberta right now and say: “Yes. That’s the kind of place that I would want to uproot my family and move across the country to”?

Moreover, Mr. Speaker, people don’t make these decisions just thinking about themselves. They think about the impact that that kind of decision will have on their families. So what kind of professional with young children, for example, would look at Alberta and see that as a desirable place to raise their children? Now, I happen to know that our professionals are incredibly interested in the kind of education that their children are going to receive before they go to school, while they’re in school, and after they graduate and go on to university or college. My friend from Edmonton-Whitemud has gone on and on and on about the problems with early childhood education in this province. It’s shocking to me that the children’s minister doesn’t cave into her just so that she’ll drop the issue and move on to something else.

It’s not just early education, Mr. Speaker, that’s a concern to parents. It’s people looking at the proposed changes to the curriculum in the K to 12 system. They’re looking at the absolute Dumpster fire that the Education minister is proposing that our children be taught and thinking: why would I want to sacrifice my kid’s future to learn all of this nonsense and potentially impact their ability to go on and become a well-trained professional like their parents are?

There are a whole host of other reasons, Mr. Speaker, that professionals are choosing not to move to Alberta, but very few, if any, of them are going to be addressed by this piece of legislation. I’m pleased that we will be able to support this legislation, make it administratively less burdensome for the few professionals who are currently seeking to move to Alberta to make that move.

I think we’re supporting these changes because we know that in 2023 a new government will be elected, one that will make Alberta an attractive place for people from other parts of the country and other parts of the world to move to again so that they don’t have to deal with these kinds of hassles when they want to register as professionals in this province. My message to professionals who are thinking about moving to Alberta: “Don’t give up hope. Change is coming very soon. A brighter future is on the way; you just have to wait 18 months to get there.”

With that, Mr. Speaker, I’m pleased to say that I’ll be supporting this piece of legislation, and I will conclude my comments. Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Sherwood Park, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Walker: Well, thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. It’s an honour to rise this morning to speak in strong support of Bill 49, the Labour Mobility Act. I’ll be speaking very much to this bill and, once more, in strong favour. You know, some economic news may be interspersed as it relates to this bill. It’ll be sort of a different reality than what you just heard from the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. Often there are different realities in this House, and of course the difference is that we believe our reality is right and the opposition’s is wrong. It’s just that simple.

[Mr. Amery in the chair]

To begin, Mr. Speaker, on the bill I just wanted to say that, yeah, I support this bill because I primarily believe it will have a very strong economic impact on Alberta. We’re actually seeing – here’s the different reality, too – a population increase in Alberta. From the last statistics I saw, we’ve increased by – it’s not a lot – about 10,000 people, and most of that is through a net immigration. We thank new Canadians who still see Alberta as the ultimate beacon of hope and opportunity, as it has been for decades. I know they’re excited about Bill 49, the Labour Mobility Act. If I have time in my speech here, I want to speak about some important new Canadian stories that will be impacted through this bill.

My own background here, too, Mr. Speaker, is really interesting. Before I became an MLA, I worked for the Alberta government in foreign qualification recognition and immigration and also was on the floor with the same unit as professional governance, which would have had a lot to do with Bill 49, so shout-outs to all the great people in those policy shops that do that important work.

This sort of bill has a direct impact on helping people achieve their dreams, achieve their potential by coming from other parts of Canada to have their credentials recognized in a faster process, allowing them, again, to realize their potential, get up and running as Albertans, and contribute to the workforce and, ultimately, the economy. Now, some economics forecasts here have measured that this bill itself, by improving labour mobility, Mr. Speaker, could have a \$3 billion a year impact on Alberta’s GDP, which is much welcomed and would help bolster an already very strong economic recovery that we are seeing since we launched the Alberta recovery plan. We’ve seen over 180,000 jobs created. Job creation continues to grow through great plans that the government is putting out but ultimately because the people of Alberta, their business is that they’re creating jobs, that they’re taking risk, that they’re getting things done.

Now, it’s also estimated that impediments to labour mobility in Canada cost the overall national economy up to \$130 billion a year, Mr. Speaker. I thank – I believe the Premier had sponsored this bill – the Premier for putting this forward, for decades being a major proponent of internal labour mobility within Canada, going back to his years as a minister in the Harper government. I’m so excited as a former qualifications professional myself to see this bill come forward and proud to speak to it in third reading.

Now, this bill is truly an Albertan bill, Mr. Speaker, because Alberta is a migration and immigration society; 60 per cent of Albertans are Albertans by choice. That is quite a statistic. We are in some ways very much the most Canadian province in Canada because we’re attracting other Canadians from everywhere across the country, from the other provinces and territories. I see them in my constituency of Sherwood Park as well.

11:20

The history of our settlement has been one of, again, mainly internal migration but also great contributions from immigration, creating economic booms. We need people to come here with their talents and start businesses, enter the workforce, utilize their skills to keep the economy roaring, as it is right now. Mr. Speaker, you know – here’s, again, the economic reality – we are seeing a strong economic recovery, with financial institutions predicting Alberta is leading the way in economic growth. We’re proud of that, and we thank the efforts of all Albertans, including our government with our Alberta recovery plan, the natural gas strategy, the hydrogen plan. Everything is helping to move things along well. My point here in relation to Bill 49 is that Alberta is the ultimate open,

migratory, free-enterprise society in Canada, and that is why we prosper. Bill 49 highlights that and gets that in droves.

I want to begin with really hitting home on the point why I strongly support Bill 49, Mr. Speaker. It is that, historically speaking, we see in the evidence that societies that are open prosper. That is in the historical record. Then I want to move to some specific sections in Bill 49 that I strongly support as a former labour mobility professional and why I think they are so thoughtful to have been put in – I thank the minister of labour for putting them in – and then, if I have time, some stories on personal impacts of labour mobility, harmonization, and recognition.

Historical examples, Mr. Speaker, of open societies, including on labour mobility, economically thriving due to their openness go back from antiquity to even just up to today. Societies are prospering when they allow for labour mobility. Going back to antiquity as well, you know, the Roman Empire, relatively speaking, had freedom of movement for a lot of workers there. Rome, of course, boomed in antiquity. The Hanseatic League in the 14th through the 16th centuries was a very successful trading block in history, with lots of migration, and a medieval precursor to the European Union, which also allows for incredible labour mobility today. The European Union is a great example of the prosperity that can come from openness and harmonization of internal labour mobility.

Now, there's a great podcast, or an historian. I think his name is Patrick Wyman. I really enjoy some of his popular history podcasts, Mr. Speaker. His central thesis was on the Byzantine Empire and its labour mobility during the late medieval period, which allowed for that empire to boom very strongly as well. As we see from antiquity to the early medieval period, relatively speaking, the societies that were the most open, including on this important issue of labour mobility, which is highlighted in Bill 49, prospered.

Now, moving more to modern day, Mr. Speaker. Britain, Switzerland, and America, for example, are extremely open, free enterprise based societies, similar in that sense to our great province of Alberta, and they prosper as well. The statistic I saw is that Americans are the most internally mobile people in the OECD, for example, and they have been like that for decades and decades and decades. Go figure; they're the richest society on Earth. People moving around with their skills, willing to pick up and start someplace new, helps move society forward and prosper. We want to be able to recognize their skills in a timely fashion, just like Bill 49 does here. Open societies, again, prosper. Britain repealed the Corn Laws in 1846, removing protectionist measures; they began to prosper. Japan opened in 1868; it began to prosper in a serious way. We want to be an open society.

Alberta has always led the way. We are the ultimate open, free-enterprise society, and this Bill 49 will help attract more Canadians, more new Canadians from abroad to come here to have their skills recognized in a timely fashion to get the economy continuing to hum.

Then, you know, specifically on societies that reduce internal barriers, they also prosper. The European Union, as I said, one of the largest economies in the world, with, I think, their 27 or 28 member states, have been an incredible success story for prosperity through internal recognition of credentials. I mean, if nation-states can do it, surely the nation of Canada can do it as well. I'm so happy Alberta is taking the lead. We're just going to open up and allow other Canadians to come here and in a timely fashion and a fair fashion have their credentials recognized, because this is the story of Alberta, people coming from other parts of Canada to realize their destiny here, prosper, raise their families, Mr. Speaker.

Heck, Australia: in 1992 they were quite a bit ahead of us. They introduced their famous mutual credential recognition system in 1992. Go figure that the six subnational units of Australia have prospered with lots of internal migration and skills recognition. They now, since 1992, have 28 years of unhindered economic growth, which is a record in the OECD. Now, a lot of that is selling exports to China, but a big part of it, too, was their own labour mobility act in 1992 that they kept building on and reforming so Australians from all the six states and territories can move around that great country and have their credentials recognized.

The proof is in the pudding here historically and from a comparative perspective, Mr. Speaker, that the open societies, the ones that recognize internal labour mobility, thrive and prosper, and that's what we want here in Alberta. That's what we have, an open society. Bill 49 strengthens internal labour mobility, which will be a win for Alberta, and it will also be a win for all of Canada.

Now, I want to highlight specific aspects of the bill, Mr. Speaker, that I really quite strongly support. I want to highlight sections 7, 8, and 9 of the bill. Go figure; I'll actually open up the bill. We can do that here. Okay. On registration, here on page 6 of the bill it says that where a labour mobility applicant has provided proof of certification to a regulatory body and has met all of the other requirements imposed by the regulatory body that are permitted... [that] body shall register that labour mobility applicant without restrictions, limitations [et cetera], unless otherwise provided.

Again, it's important to have this in the legislation, because I know, from my former life in labour mobility on the foreign qualifications side, being aware of the domestic labour mobility and working with those people, it's important to have this in writing for a sense of fairness. So often you would hear from, you know, some professional person from, let's say, Ontario or Nova Scotia. They had everything they needed for engineering or dentistry or to become a vet, but for whatever reason the college here wasn't quite recognizing it. It's saying here clearly that if everything is similar, they shall recognize. This will help assist in the fair registration and recognition of their credentials. That is needed. I can tell you that from a professional perspective.

Also critical is section 8 on page 6, Mr. Speaker, timely decisions and responses. I heard this all the time as a former professional in this field, that, you know, everyone needs to get in their employment with their skill sets so they can contribute to the economy. They have their family to feed. They need to get working in their field. So we need these regulatory bodies to recognize their credentials in a timely manner.

Sometimes you would hear horror stories of certain colleges taking, you know, six months to a year. Well, when someone moves here from Nova Scotia or British Columbia, they need the process of the recognition of their Canadian credentials done in a faster, more timely manner. It says here:

A regulatory body shall, within 10 business days... provide a written acknowledgement of receipt.

That's really good. I support that.

And:

A regulatory body shall, within 20 business days... in respect of the application for registration, make a registration decision in respect of that application.

This is a timely process. It's laid out here, so it gives certainty to people wanting to move here that they will have their credentials recognized in a timely manner.

I can't stress how much I support that. Too many Canadians who come here faced long wait times for their credentials to be recognized. It hinders them from coming here and getting up and running and contributing up to \$3 billion in GDP growth if we are

to pass this bill, and I strongly urge all members of the House to do that.

Mr. Speaker, could I do a time check? One minute? Okay. I can't tell my stories, but that's okay.

11:30

I just wanted to also quickly say, Mr. Speaker, that this also powerfully affects new Canadians. So many new Canadians start in one province. I think of my friend Divyang. He started in Newfoundland, got his Canadian credential there, but it took a really long time for him to get recognized . . . [interjection] Do I have an intervention? Oh. Go ahead.

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you very much to the hon. member for allowing me a little bit of time to just ask a couple of additional questions. I, for one, am actually quite interested to hear about some of those additional stories he was talking about, which will add some context, obviously. The Member for Sherwood Park has some extensive experience, as he alluded to, with labour mobility in other jurisdictions. I would just like to grant him a little bit of extra time to be able to share with the House some of those additional stories for context.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Walker: Well, thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, through you, to the Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain. I really like that guy; I always have. I've got a few more minutes to tell some important personal stories that I hope will inform the House as everyone, hopefully, will decide to vote in favour. Just on Divyang – so many new Canadians come here, and they start in a different province first . . . [interjection] Oh. Okay. Yeah. Thanks.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm just curious. I know that my colleague is actually from the Atlantic provinces, similar to myself. I'm wondering if he sees this bill impacting relatives of his or if he knows family or friends back there that might be impacted and encouraged to come to Alberta and bring their skills out here to help us out as we face our labour challenges.

Mr. Walker: That's an excellent question. I thank the Member for West Yellowhead for it. I also like him as much as I like the Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain, Mr. Speaker. I would say, you know what? Atlantic Canadians have come out here in droves over the past generation or so. The migratory patterns have been over the last century: Atlantic Canadians first going to the New England states; then post war up to the 1970s they went to Ontario, largely; but for the last 30 or 40 years those seeking hopes and opportunities, like myself and yourself, have come to Alberta, which we want to continue to recognize. With this bill, it will ensure that, yes, I would say to the Member for West Yellowhead with his great question, this will attract more Atlantic Canadians and all Canadians to come out here, including, heck, I think he asked, my family. Well, you know what? Maybe my brother will come out here. Maybe I'll tell him and I'll say: man, you've got to see Bill 49; you'll want to come out here and have your skills recognized.

Just how it positively impacts new Canadians: my friend Divyang, for example, came from India. He started in Newfoundland, got his Canadian credential there, then went to Toronto. This is a very common story for new Canadians. I know that the Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism would be very well aware of these stories. The path of new Canadians starts in one province, maybe even another province, and then they make it God's country, Alberta. When he came here, his Canadian credential wasn't immediately recognized, including not

in a timely fashion. That's again why I strongly support section 8. We need that. He went through a difficult process. I just think a bill like this will also not only benefit Canadians, which is very important, but new Canadians who come here and start in another province.

I also think about my friend Dhaval, who started from India, went to England, where he got an MBA. Then he came to Toronto, got a Canadian credential there, and now he's been living here in Alberta for 15 years, a successful businessman with two wonderful children, a great family. He also felt that the recognition of his Ontario credential was not done in a timely manner, and I know he feels – and I've told him about Bill 49, that it strengthens the recognition process.

I would just say, in closing, Mr. Speaker, that I urge the House to support Bill 49, the Labour Mobility Act. This will strengthen Alberta's economy and get Albertans back to work and also attract new Albertans here.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, we are on Bill 49, the Labour Mobility Act. I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to provide some comments at this stage of debate on Bill 49, the Labour Mobility Act. For the benefit and merriment of my colleagues and the tens of people watching at home, I will often rename bills so that I can keep them straight in my head because I cannot keep the numbers straight. This one I think I will rename: gold star for discovering the job description and carry on if you must bill. The reason why I have given it such a ringing endorsement is because I still have questions about this sort of unilateral business of changing some of these things without other provinces reciprocating. While I recognize that that might be, in fact, a competitive advantage for Alberta – and that's good – I still wonder how much it will actually have an effect and/or actually help us make sure that we are taking down unnecessary trade barriers across the country.

I'll leave that hesitation aside to simply say that in instances where we require this sort of recognition of out-of-province credentials, this may in fact expedite that process, provided, of course, that the province publishes the regulations in a timely fashion. What we've seen with the foreign qualifications bill that we passed with the opposition's support some years ago now, Mr. Speaker: the most relevant regulation, that is to say the one imposing a timeline on recognition of foreign credentials, has as yet – I'm happy to be updated, but at my last check of it anyway – not been a regulation that was published by the province.

You know, our ability to know whether this legislation will actually have any practical effect for individual people and/or individual employers seeking specific skill sets is contingent upon – again I refer back to the job description and the government focusing on that instead of other things. I think the reason why I am, I guess, somewhat skeptical of this legislation or, in fact, I sound a bit like it is a partial response to Alberta's current economic situation is because it is. It's fine insofar as it goes, which is why I have affixed the moniker of: carry on if you must.

But we see that of the structural issues created, some of which are large, economic, international issues with which Alberta has to grapple – I'm speaking here of the energy transition and the reality of climate change – some are, in fact, entirely authored by the specific policy and spending power and other decisions that are specific and deliberate expressions of public policy that have come straight from Executive Council. Those are the pieces that have in fact led to the situation that we have today of five straight quarters of net outflow of people from Alberta.

If we want to talk about interprovincial relationships, that is the one that should be seizing this government right now. You know, it is nothing less than hilarious to hear the Member for Sherwood Park stand up and talk about the population numbers without talking about the net provincial migration, which is, in fact, what this bill seeks to speak to, and net population all told last quarter was a net negative. So, yes, the population increased, but what was the net is actually the specific question that should be seizing us, and here we don't just have anecdotes; we have five straight quarters of data.

Feelings and stories are all very nice and well, Mr. Speaker, but what's better is a fact-based assessment of what's actually happening in this province, and five straight quarters of interprovincial out-migration is a fact with which one must grapple if the response to the economic challenges that Albertans are facing right now is going to be more than just some sort of screeching talking point coming from the front benches.

Now, we saw the ATB on October 12 report a net loss of 16,000 people from this province. This comes after StatsCan reported a fourth consecutive quarter of net negative interprovincial migration, in which they observed that the two largest pushes for that were among women and young people. They were the hardest hit in terms of both the economic opportunities and economic challenges presented by the pandemic but were one of the biggest drivers of this.

[The Speaker in the chair]

In Q2 our net outflow was 5,447 individual people; the cumulative, of course, observed by the sort of deputy chief economist at the ATB, being that 16,000 figure, Mr. Speaker.

11:40

Now, there are a number of structural factors that have contributed to this. There's one more coming, and that is a very likely interest rate rise, that the Bank of Canada has now signalled, where they were signalling to the Parliamentary Budget Officer that that likely rate hike would come in Q3 or Q4 of 2022. They've now softened that language. In their October 27 release they indicated that that rate hike is likely to come "sometime in the middle quarters." They're hedging a little bit there. They are also, like central banks around the world, indicating that they are drawing down their policy of quantitative easing and, in fact, going to be meeting some of the inflationary pressures that we're seeing in the economy through a likely rate hike. Now, that rate hike will make it harder for people to enter the housing market. It will make life slightly less affordable for anyone who is servicing any kind of debt whatsoever on the consumer side, small-business loans, and so on. It will have an effect on the economy.

Of course, the policies of central banks around the world are well outside the purview of this Chamber, and monetary policy more generally is mostly outside, I would argue, the purview of this Chamber. Having said that, you know, the fiscal policy is properly the domain of any provincial Legislature. Increasingly, provincial Legislatures have a great deal of influence over the material conditions of people's lives through using those levers. Here I am talking about income taxes, property taxes, school fees, tuition, interest on student debt, utility bills, and insurance. All of those factors have contributed to an affordability crisis that was in part, I think, papered over by federal COVID-related stimulus spending and federal replacement, federal transfers to this province, in particular, in health and education and elsewhere. But all of those issues are now bubbling up to the surface in tandem with a very likely rate hike on its way.

What that has meant is that we have seen that net migration of people to leave. It is not just one factor of current economic

conditions; that is to say, the job market as it stands sort of static right now. It is also how people perceive the future recovery and what the character of that recovery will be. I think that when people increasingly see their purchasing power being eroded by a series of expressions of government policy and interventions or noninterventions in the economy – I would argue that lifting the cap on car insurance, for example, is an intervention in the economy. It's just an intervention on behalf of very large and profitable insurance companies and to the detriment of ordinary people trying to pay a bill on a monthly basis.

You know, our capacity to recover these interprovincial migration numbers, to create a job market where people actually want to come here, which they are not right now – that's the factual statement. I think what we need to do is view this a little bit more broadly. People make their economic decisions not based on one factor. We know this. This frustrates economists, that people are not necessarily entirely motivated by simply economic conditions or that their view of what economic conditions are is so much more broad than a GDP indicator or this kind of thing. It is in fact – and we see this in trading as well; we see this in terms of how stock prices go up and down, how valuation is understood – also based on feelings about how the future is going to unfold. What we have is if young people – all they hear from employers, from training programs, from research programs that they have attended and just recently completed in science, technology and engineering, all they hear from investors, all they hear about what dominates at corporate boardrooms is the fact that we need to be prepared for a carbon-constrained future.

All they have heard from Conservative parties, with some exceptions across the country but certainly this one without fail, since 2017, so we're now getting into year 5 of this – I would argue even before that, but really it was turned up to 11, this sort of approach, when the current Premier took over, and I use those words specifically, the current configuration of the party as it is right now. When young people hear those aspects of a carbon-constrained future, of climate risk, of climate change reality, of the need to understand climate resilience, whether it's in our engineering training or our new technology that we might apply to current oil and gas activities, all they hear from the leader of the United Conservatives is that this is the flavour of the month.

Folks will take their cues from that. Those words matter. It hasn't been just since they took government, as I said. It's interesting that those basic Conservative talking points and that sort of perceived wisdom has in fact been abandoned by the federal Conservatives because they see it as an economic and political dead end, but what's very clear is that the governing party here in Alberta sees that as a dead horse worth continuing to beat.

Now, young people hear that language and they hear the dissonance between the rhetoric and what they know is the economic and scientific reality, and they are acting accordingly. I would also argue that it's not just the energy transition that is a longer term factor in out-migration and economic optimism. In a more short-term perspective, health care matters to people, both those who work in it and those who access it. When you're talking about family physicians, that is everyone. That is all of us. That is not some specific specialty that we may be a little bit backed up on in our metrics and in our numbers, like we heard at Public Accounts this morning; this is literally everyone.

When you have GPs leaving this province and seeking out to fulfill their careers where they actually have – oh, I don't know – an agreement in place to do so, you have a situation where, again, people will not consider coming here, and folks are voting with their feet on this because of a very simple, basic service. Do they hear anything approaching contrition from the front benches of this

government? Do they hear anything approaching understanding that they may have created a problem? Even though now maybe they understand that there's a reality of the problem, they have barely and begrudgingly acknowledged that. Are they hearing any expressions that they might be doing something differently to address the problem? Absolutely not. Not to mention the fact that certainly with the reputational damage of mismanagement of the pandemic that has been done to us on a nation-wide basis, there is no real indication to anyone outside of our province's borders or within it, for that matter, that there is going to be a significant change in how they approach health care at all. That, too, will contribute to our overall net migration, which I indicated is net negative and has been for five straight quarters.

It is those basic functions of government, Mr. Speaker, access to health, affordability, that we need to get right if we're going to keep people here and attract them here from other provinces.

Thank you.

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

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise in third reading of Bill 49. This is actually a bill that I have not had an opportunity to speak to, so I am pleased that I am having this opportunity now even though we know we don't have too much time left. I really want to thank my colleagues from Edmonton-Gold Bar and from Lethbridge-West for these very insightful comments. It's interesting to hear that the Member for Sherwood Park talked about that his comments are coming from another reality, and I think that's, unfortunately, part of the problem with this government, that they are living in another reality.

11:50

It's not like, you know, there are alternate facts here. Facts are facts, and reality is reality. Unfortunately, most Albertans have a pretty clear idea that their reality is not what this government is responding to day to day. We see that with respect to their response to COVID over and over and over again. While everybody else had a certain experience in terms of the effects on their lives and their businesses, on their children, this government was off on holidays. There does seem to be another reality that this government is operating in.

With respect to this bill, you know, the opportunity to speak to it is important because, as my colleague the Member for Lethbridge-West indicated, you know, gold star for finally doing this. I think that this is something that, yeah, we are in support of. It is important to have a clear and transparent and timely process for professional credentials to be recognized. I will acknowledge that I have certainly heard that from my constituents. I have a number of constituents, for example, who are nurses from other countries and who have had challenges and experienced challenges in having their credentials recognized here in Alberta. Putting some timelines on that is important.

I do also want to acknowledge that I'm glad to hear that the government accepted one of the amendments that was brought forward by the Official Opposition with respect to this bill to allow for an exemption from the timelines for some periods of time in certain circumstances. I think that in debate we discussed the fact that there are certainly some organizations that do this professional credential recognition that are actually made up of volunteers, not employees, and it may be challenging in some circumstances that these bodies are held to these very strict 20-day timelines for making a decision about credentialing.

I also want to raise something that was brought to my attention by a constituent of mine – I'd like to mention Ms Ingrid Barlow,

who brought this to my attention with respect to this bill – which also speaks to the need for some kind of exemption in certain circumstances from the timeline set out in the bill. She spoke to the reality, which is very true, that, you know, it's not always within the control of the regulatory body to be able to gather all of the information within a set period of time.

Often, of course, when you've got somebody, a professional, coming from another jurisdiction, they actually have to go contact the regulatory body in that other province, and that other province may not be working on the same sense of urgency or timelines that we are here in Alberta. Certainly, there should be some recognition of that. We would hope that, you know, all provinces will start to take this process a little bit more seriously, perhaps, and provide some timelines and guidance, but for now regulatory bodies should not be, I guess, punished if they've made their best efforts and are trying to reach out and other provinces, for example, are not complying with the same timelines that we have in this bill.

I appreciate those comments from Ms Barlow. I think that's very true. She spoke to some other challenges around what information actually comes from other provinces when you're looking at, you know, professional disciplinary problems. I think that's outside of the scope of this bill, but it certainly is something that we should be cognizant of in terms of transparency around information when somebody is coming from another jurisdiction.

I share the comments from my colleagues, which is that while this is, I guess, going to be very good for those people who are living here in Alberta right now who maybe have those challenges, I am less convinced that this is going to attract people in droves to Alberta, as the government seems to be suggesting, for many of the reasons that have been outlined by my colleagues. I really appreciated the comment from the Member for Lethbridge-West, which we know is true, which is that there are a lot of factors that go into people's decisions about moving to Alberta. Right now our reputation, both nationally and internationally, is not that great, and that's mainly because of this government's action.

Internationally we've shown ourselves, through this government, to be lagging behind what's going on in terms of renewable energy, what's going on in terms of energy transition. We have a government whose head is stuck in the sand about what's happening. Then even within Canada we're seeing absolutely a huge resistance from this government to acknowledge that there are many quality of life factors that go into people's decisions both to move to Alberta but also to stay in Alberta. If we are going to be ignoring those factors, which this government seems to do by continuing to undercut and devastate our health care system, our postsecondary system, our early learning and child care system, our education system, we will not be doing what we need to do to attract people to stay here.

You know, I've often said, Mr. Speaker, that I attended university for a period of time in another province, and when I came back to Alberta and I decided to have a family, I often was very grateful for the idea that I chose to come back to Alberta because I knew that we had a strong public education system. I knew that this was where I wanted my kids to go to school, especially compared to other provinces.

Yet we see this curriculum that's brought forward by this new government, and it's getting headlines for all the worst reasons. I don't know if I would make that same decision if I knew that this was the kind of curriculum that my kids were going to be learning from. Unfortunately, if this government has its way, it is going to be the curriculum that my children are learning from. That's why I'm in this role today, to advocate for a much better future for my children and for anybody else who lives in Alberta and chooses to come to Alberta.

I know that we don't have a lot of time left. I have indicated that I will be supporting this bill with respect to what it does in terms of the timelines for certification, but I do have to say very clearly that there is a lot more that not only needs to be done but needs to be undone by this government in the choices and decisions they've made to date. If we want to make Alberta a place where people want to come, where people want to live, where they want to invest, where they want to create and innovate, it's not going to be under this government, Mr. Speaker, and that's been made abundantly clear.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will vote in support of this bill, but this government has a lot of work to do and undo.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others?

Seeing none, I am prepared to close debate.

[Motion carried; Bill 49 read a third time]

Ms Issik: I move that we adjourn debate until 1:30 this afternoon.

The Speaker: Hon. members, prior to calling the question for adjournment, I would just like to beg the indulgence of the House for 10 seconds or less and remind everyone that today is the Stollery children's hospital day here at the Legislature. I know that members of the Stollery Children's Hospital Foundation are set up in the lower rotunda. I encourage members to stop by and say a quick hello.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:58 a.m.]

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