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The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, November 24, 2021

Day 131

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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New Democrat: 24

Independent: 2

Vacant: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, November 24, 2021

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Members' Statements

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

Holodomor Memorial Day

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to commemorate the victims of the Holodomor genocide. Ukrainian people have faced many hardships over their history, none worse than the Holodomor genocide. The term "Holodomor" is derived from the Ukrainian words for hunger, holod, and extermination, mor. The Holodomor was a deliberate, planned famine enacted by the Communist regime of Joseph Stalin to punish farmers who refused to participate in the Communist collectivization of their lands. During the Holodomor Stalin's regime sealed off much of central-eastern Ukraine from any incoming food. All grain and agricultural products were confiscated, and people were forbidden from leaving Ukraine in search of food. During this time millions of men, women, and children were starved to death. For many Ukrainian families the horrors and lessons of the Holodomor have lived on for generations.

Mr. Speaker, more than 10 per cent of Alberta's population is able to trace their lineage to the early Ukrainian immigrants who settled in this province. In fact, I am one of them, and I'm proud that our family are descendants of the Pylypows, the first Ukrainian immigrants to Canada. My baba Annie Pylypow married Mike Huley. They had nine children and lived on a farm in Chipman, Alberta, their entire lives. When I would go to visit baba, I would sit on her lap on her apron, and often it would be lumpy. "What's in your apron, Baba?" I would ask. She said: potatoes. You see, my baba would carry a few potatoes in her apron at all times because, she said, you never know when you might need them. I remember this about my baba fondly, but I look back on this and reflect on the great sadness behind it.

While we as Ukrainians love food, we also value and cherish food because of its dark chapter in our history. Here in Alberta we recognize the Holodomor as a genocide, with the fourth Saturday in November of each year serving as a day of remembrance for victims. Mr. Speaker, this is a dark chapter in human history that we recognize and remember so we never have to relive it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Holodomor Memorial Day

Mr. Bilous: On the fourth Saturday of November each year we pause to reflect and remember the loss of life from Holodomor. The Ukrainian people were subjects of an organized famine by the Soviet Union, a concerted effort to eradicate a culture through mass starvation. Make no mistake; the Holodomor was an undeniable act of genocide, an unforgivable crime against humanity. The word "Holodomor" comes from the Ukrainian words "holod" and "mor," hunger and death, an evocative word for extermination by starvation the Ukrainian people endured between 1932-33. It's estimated that 10 million people lost their lives.

Alberta is a proud home to almost 400,000 people of Ukrainian ancestry, and I'm proud to be amongst them. Many Ukrainian Albertans have family connections to the atrocities committed during

the famine. To lose a child, parent, grandparent, or cousin in a horrific way has a ripple effect throughout a family for generations. Our community is still healing from the wounds suffered in 1932. It is painfully clear that the Ukrainian famine was not due to drought, pestilence, or natural disaster but an intentional attack by Joseph Stalin and his dictatorial regime on the Ukrainian peasant population of Soviet Ukraine.

1933 is not that long ago. Survivors of Holodomor are still with us today, including Leonid Korownyk. We cannot allow the memories of Holodomor to die with those we lost. We cannot stand idly by and watch history repeat itself. But from darkness hope can emerge. We understand that the past cannot be changed and that we cannot right these wrongs done to our ancestors, only use this tragedy as a reminder that from the depths of despair the spirit of the Ukrainian people was not broken. It continues to exist in the millions of Ukrainians across the world and here in Alberta. [Remarks in Ukrainian]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac St. Anne-Parkland has a statement to make.

Extinction Rebellion

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In this House we're all aware of the comments made by Dr. David Suzuki, comments that could be construed as promoting violence and terrorism. Dr. Suzuki made these comments while speaking at a Victoria rally for Extinction Rebellion, a band of radical eco terrorists that have previously been classified by the U.K. Security Service as an extremist group. Well, just like David Suzuki, Extinction Rebellion has been busy bolstering their extremists credentials.

Many of their activities here in Alberta have been participating in recent blockades, transportation and infrastructure. On Monday evening they were blockading Edmonton's High Level Bridge in the middle of rush hour. Yesterday in Calgary they were blocking the C-Train down in Calgary on 4th Avenue. In months gone by, activists have blockaded the Waltherdale Bridge and rail lines in my own constituency out in Acheson. Again, to the locals that ended that one, my many thanks, as Albertans thanked you as well, for taking the bull by the horns and putting an end to it. These actions are dangerous and unlawful from Extinction Rebellion, no surprise.

However, after Suzuki's comments activists are threatening to do even worse. One of their organizers recently said, quote: it is now the age of consequences; we need action. Well, what kind of actions are they thinking and talking about? Well, their national action strategy co-ordinator said, quote: not only will pipelines be blown up, but we can be certain that world leaders will be put on trial for treason or, worse, be killed. Let's be clear what this statement is. It's a threat to bomb pipelines. It's a threat of executing democratically elected leaders that support our energy sector, and these threats don't stop at industry and government. The same individual said, quote: the same goes for the media.

Mr. Speaker, this is serious and very disturbing. What is more concerning is that a member of the House, NDP Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, previously expressed support for this extremist group. She said that their perspective should be brought into Albertan classrooms. Full heartedly naive, dangerous, disgusting to expose those . . .

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

Polling Places in Indigenous Communities

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week I made a simple request of this government. It was not partisan. It was not a trick

question. It was not a difficult question. It was asking that they commit that there be an on-reserve polling place in every single First Nations community for the upcoming by-election for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche. Rather than simply agreeing that every resident of that riding would be able to vote in their community, the Minister of Municipal Affairs didn't commit.

Instead, we heard about mail-in votes and how arrangements were made at neighbouring municipalities but no commitment for this basic democratic right. This is a very real concern after the municipal, Senate, and referendum elections this fall, when this government did not ensure on-reserve balloting for Indigenous communities. Indigenous leaders called this voter suppression. They called it disenfranchisement and said that it excluded the rights of Indigenous people to participate.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs might think it's acceptable to force Indigenous voters to travel outside of their communities to vote, but let me put this in terms that he will likely understand more. If at the next provincial election Elections Alberta did not put a polling station in Calgary-Hays but told the residents to drive to Okotoks or Chestermere to vote, would he find that acceptable? Would he defend that decision like he defends this one? I think not.

Mr. Speaker, this Legislature should be doing every single thing it can to make it easier to vote. This government, rather than rationalizing its undemocratic decisions, should be doing more to ensure that every single Albertan can cast their ballots in their communities. We won't know how many voters were unable to vote because of this decision. We likely won't know how many voters lost faith in the democratic system because this government didn't think protecting the right to vote was important.

I reiterate my call today for this government to ensure that whenever the by-election is called, every single Indigenous Albertan can vote in their community. Anything less is a betrayal of the history of democracy in this province.

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

Hemp Industry

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to announce that the hemp industry is finally taking off here in Alberta. Companies with exciting hemp processing technologies are making investments in our province, and this is opening up the value chain for farmers and value-added manufacturers. Recently Blue Sky hemp corporation, a company with novel technology to extract high-quality protein from hemp seeds, is interested in building a large-scale processing facility here.

1:40

Hemp protein is highly nutritional and low in saturated fats, and they are satisfying proven markets for plant-based protein and have additional opportunities in the cosmetic and nutraceutical industries. On the economic front Blue Sky will create 75 permanent jobs and 200 construction jobs. More importantly, their long-term objectives are to reach one million acres of hemp cultivation in rural Canada, which would generate 2,000 direct farming jobs and several times that in processing and manufacturing jobs. Every acre of hemp sequesters eight to 15 tonnes of carbon, so this industry can help Alberta meet its CO₂ emissions reductions goals.

A second company, Inca renewable technologies, is proposing to build a 200,000 square foot fibre processing and biocomposites manufacturing facility near Medicine Hat. They are world-leading experts in natural fibre composites who have built factories that currently supply Ford, GM, Chrysler, Toyota, Tesla, and many others. At full capacity Inca will employ 80 people. More

importantly, they will utilize the biomass waste stream from protein production and turn it into high-value products for automotive, RV, consumer plastics, and building materials industries.

Mr. Speaker, the world needs more Alberta energy, but I truly believe it also needs more Alberta hemp. This is an opportunity to diversify our agricultural economy and create value-added products right here in the province. Let's not miss this chance.

COVID-19 Response

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, I am so proud to serve the people of Edmonton-North West. I know the people, the businesses, the community. I know how we all come together and support each other in good times and bad and how we can celebrate together and stand together, too.

Things haven't been so good, however, in quite some time, and it saddens me to no end. The failures of this UCP government, their incompetent leadership, their abandoning of a post at a time when my constituents and all Albertans, for that matter, needed them most is evident in every corner of my constituency. I see it in the small businesses that have been forced to drastically scale back their hours due to declining sales, and some have been forced to close for good. I've seen it in the seniors' lodges, who have made it through four waves of a virus, mourning friends and loved ones and lost in fear of what might soon be coming again. I see it in my own home as well. My wife and my eldest daughter have been working on the front lines of this pandemic since day one. They never asked for anything except for the support for what they were doing and the reassurance that this government was there on our front lines as well doing everything they could do to put an end to the pain and suffering.

But this government wasn't there. They went missing when they should've been leading. Their actions have caused more pain and more suffering. While my loved ones and tens of thousands of front-line workers put on their PPE every day and headed directly into the path of this virus, the supposed governing leaders of this province were off to Hawaii and Mexico in the second wave and Europe in the fourth. This government is a government that doesn't seem to want to govern. It's too busy infighting, too busy trying to save their own political lives rather than saving actual lives. Mr. Speaker and to the constituents of Edmonton-North West, in 2023 I hope that we might see something better.

Fish Creek Provincial Park and Bow Valley Ranche

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, Fish Creek is one of the crowns of our provincial park system and the Bow Valley Ranche site one of its gems, a place of history and gathering at the confluence of Fish Creek and the Bow River dating back to our honoured First Nations, early settlers, and tied inextricably to our ranching and agrarian roots.

Today the home built by William Roper Hull in 1896 and later home to Pat Burns of the Big Four speaks to us of its storied working past but also to its glory as a gathering place for leaders of industry, royalty, and luminaries of the day making the wagon trek south to enjoy this special place. Slated for demolition in 1994 due to budget constraints and lack of government funding, a group of community-spirited individuals led by Mitzie and Larry Wasyliw embarked on a journey of dedication, passion for community, and the preservation of our proud history.

Today the Bow Valley Ranche is yet again a place of gathering, learning, appreciation and stewardship of the land and history and for celebration. The partnerships developed here over the past 27 years at little cost to taxpayers could be a province-wide model for parks development and community engagement from the early collaboration between Alberta Parks, Bow Valley Ranche Historical

Society, and Friends of Fish Creek to emerging initiatives, including the Blackfoot Nation and Alberta Champions in the ambitious development of the *iisttii'ik* or Listen garden.

As renewal of the partnerships that have delivered incredible value to Albertans and visitors alike is under way, I encourage all of you and indeed all Albertans to visit this very special site to see what can be done in your community to deliver shared value and community benefits at minimal cost to our challenged balance sheets, all while knowing that such incredible assets loved and cherished by Albertans are in good hands and can indeed be managed effectively, efficiently, and with accountability through the innovative partnerships that we in the UCP often speak of and, Mr. Speaker, that we intend to deliver upon.

Thank you.

Indigenous Artists and Bill 75

Ms Goehring: Mr. Speaker, for the past number of weeks we have been debating in this House a bill that recognizes the valuable contribution that artists make to the province but is short on actions to support them. On Monday I brought forward a very simple amendment to the bill to clearly include the recognition of Indigenous artists. The minister denied it, saying that no one culture is more important than another. I wish I could say that this was the only example of the failure of the UCP to understand what reconciliation looks like.

I asked about this refusal to include Indigenous traditions and culture in Bill 75 during QP yesterday, and the Premier brushed it aside to focus on pipelines and economic prosperity, inferring that we have to make a choice between one or the other. It's ironic that I should have to point out to the leader of this province that the focus of the residential school system was to forget about Indigenous traditions and cultures and learn about economic prosperity.

I wish that it got better from here, but it got worse. The Premier claimed that the proposed Arts Professions Recognition Act includes a very clear and beautiful articulation of the centrality of Indigenous culture to Alberta's identity and history. Well, I know how to read, and I know how to use the control-F function, so I used it on Bill 75. Every time I hit enter on Indigenous, the computer beeped at me to indicate zero hits. Every time.

Mr. Speaker, that is why I proposed an amendment to include Indigenous artists in the bill because, unlike the misinformation provided by the Premier, they are not central to this bill. There is not a clear articulation. Indigenous people are omitted from Bill 75, and apparently that is how the UCP wants it to stay.

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

COVID-19 Vaccination Rates in Northeast Calgary

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to congratulate my constituents and all northeast Calgary residents who have achieved a remarkable 99 per cent COVID vaccination rate with at least one dose. The hard-working Albertans who live in this area are setting a strong example of what public responsibility and caring for our neighbours, friends, and family truly means. In addition, residents between the ages of 60 to 74 have reached an amazing 100 per cent vaccination rate.

Many of us remember that the vaccine uptake in northeast Calgary was very low earlier in the pandemic. There were issues with navigating the online systems, working schedules, and language barriers that prevented people from taking advantage of the vaccine. This led to a major outbreak in that area. I'm proud to say that after persistent discussion and increased awareness of some

of these barriers, Alberta Health Services and our dedicated health professionals answered the call and once again responded to help the community overcome these difficulties. Over this past summer a mass vaccination clinic was set up. Volunteers and workers arranged transport options, extended the hours of operation, and provided this service in 72 different languages. This recognition of the diversity of the community removed the obstacles that existed.

I especially want to thank the community itself for their willingness to do their part in fighting COVID-19. You have all stepped up, and for that all Albertans are very grateful to you.

If you are holding off getting vaccinated, please reconsider. Join with your fellow Albertans in northeast Calgary and help to end this pandemic. As of today the ages of five to 11 have opened for appointments. Please consider it.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Deaths of Children in Care and Youth Transitioning out of Care

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, the deaths of children in care are a heartbreaking reminder that we must do better. According to new figures 34 children have died in the last seven months alone: 13 were under 12, five were teenagers between 13 and 17, and 16 young adults between 18 and 24. Every death is a tragedy, but this year we are on track to nearly double the fatalities of last year, which itself was the highest number ever. Can the Premier tell this House why that is and what actions he is taking?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the hon. the Leader of the Opposition for raising a very important issue. We do know that through the COVID era we've seen an increase in family violence and domestic violence. We've also seen children and youth disproportionately affected by COVID restrictions, closures, isolation, and all that has followed from that. We also know about the growing number of deaths for youth and young adults related to addiction and opioid overdoses in particular. That is why the Minister of Children's Services has directed the ministry to conduct a thorough review and to speak with the office of the Child and Youth Advocate on this matter.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, when we look at the ages more closely, the number of young adults dying while receiving services doubled under this government. Part of the problem is that this UCP government chose to shove more young adults, children who have experienced more trauma than we will ever know, off government supports. The Premier even went to court to defend this unforgivable act, and lucky for him but not them, he won, successfully robbing these youth of financial and emotional security. Now we're starting to see the consequences of that decision. Will the Premier reverse it?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, adults in their 20s who have been in, for example, foster care and those situations, who can't access appropriate services may continue to receive support and financial assistance from that program. We do know that there has been a particular increase in opioid overdoses, and that is one of the reasons why Alberta is investing over \$200 million in additional support for intervening with people coping with those addictions, to offer detox treatment and lifetime recovery as part of our continuum of care.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, the services to which this government said they would be transferring these young adults have actually themselves been cut.

The minister promised Albertans that they wouldn't do the transition until COVID was over, but today we learned it's already started. Then just now in answers to questions from the press she said: it is too early to tell if our policy of cutting them off is responsible for this increase in deaths. Here's a suggestion. Until you know the answer, reverse the decision.

Mr. Kenney: I can hardly believe it. We're talking about people's deaths, and we have members of the NDP whooping it up. Mr. Speaker, what is wrong with these people over there? The minister has assured us that these services will be available to young adults who need them. Please, I ask the NDP to stop cheering on questions about the death of people.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Support for Youth Transitioning out of Care

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, the minister assured people that they would not be transitioned until after the pandemic, and we've just learned that they have already started transitioning. We also know that they are being transitioned to services that have been cut through, for instance, the cut to the rent supplement. On top of it, she just said that it is too early to tell whether their decision to push them off services is part of the reason the deaths have gone up. Once again I ask the Premier to answer the question. Will he reverse that cruel decision?

Mr. Kenney: Once again, Mr. Speaker, the minister has been clear that individuals in their 20s who need continued services under that particular program, the support and financial assistance agreements, will have that support.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, this government went to court as recently as January of 2021 in order to defend their decision to end supports between the ages of 22 and 24. They then promised Albertans that they would not act on that decision until the pandemic was over. Today we discovered that they have been acting on that decision, and they have been pushing those vulnerable adults off supports since that time. Will the Premier reverse the decision and keep them on supports until age 24?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, once again, individuals in their 20s who need that additional support will continue to access it through the SFAA program. Let us be clear that this is a broader challenge we are facing due to isolation, the mental and emotional health pressure created by that, felt disproportionately by children and youth and young adults. This is one of the reasons why Alberta has been reluctant to have endless, hard lockdowns that would have further driven people to isolation, which has also fuelled the addictions crisis. All of these matters are connected.

Ms Notley: The Premier does not seem to understand the issue here. Allow me again to try to make it as clear as possible. You went to court in order to terminate the SFAA funding between the ages of 22 and 24. You wanted the right to do that, unfortunately. He then promised that it wouldn't happen until after the pandemic. We've heard today that it has been happening. The number of children in that age group who are dying has shot up. Will the Premier reverse that decision and stop pulling money from these vulnerable young adults?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, once again, if there are vulnerable adults in their 20s who need the support of the SFAA program, they will continue to access it. We need to address the broader issue: last year record numbers of opioid overdoses, clearly connected to the social isolation created by COVID restrictions. We need to be very conscious of the broader impact of COVID instability and isolation on children, adolescents, and young adults, which is one of the reasons this government appointed the special committee to examine child and youth mental health and wellness.

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

Child Protective Services Support for Youth Transitioning out of Care

Ms Pancholi: For more than two years I've asked in this House for updates on the recommendations of the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention. The minister's response is just that work is being done, but the drastic increases in deaths of children, youth, and young people in the child intervention system, particularly Indigenous children, make it clear that that work is failing. The minister has stated multiple times that work on this file must be collaborative, and I agree. The devastating results speak for themselves, so let's convene a new multiparty panel to examine the system and get it fixed today. Will the Minister of Children's Services commit to putting aside politics and form a new multiparty panel on child intervention . . .

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would say this. The member opposite knows since the very first time we met that I firmly believe child intervention is not about partisan politics. This is something that I take very seriously. We will absolutely look into the cases in each one of these situations. Any time there is a death of a child in care or who has received services from government it's exceptionally serious. My heart goes out to these children, to their families, and to all of those in their support system. We continue to listen to the feedback from the all-party panel, and we have implemented or begun work on almost all of those recommendations.

Ms Pancholi: Well, this minister cut 500 vulnerable young people off during a pandemic, when she promised not to do so. She actually went to court for the right to do that during a pandemic, and now we see the results today. For somebody who cares so much about children in care, her work does not show that. Now I'm asking once again to the Minister of Children's Services. Put politics aside. Commit to listening to the Child and Youth Advocate and the Indigenous children in care and their families who have suffered such devastating loss. Form a panel right now, a multiparty panel, nonpartisan, to deal with this issue today.

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, I take this issue incredibly seriously, and that's why a number of weeks ago I reached out to the ministry to ask for an additional review of policy and practice in all of these cases to see if there is, in fact, anything else we could do and to make sure that our policies and the new legislation in place are being followed. I also had a conversation with the office of the Child and Youth Advocate about this to see if he had any insights on these numbers that we're seeing. We will continue to deliver. I would ask the members opposite to quit sharing misinformation. Young people have been successfully transitioning into adulthood. We continue to support all young adults who need . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, the minister just said that young people have been transitioning successfully out of care. We just learned that 14 of those young people in the past seven months have died while transitioning out of care. This minister implemented a change that would cut vulnerable young people out of supports to transition out of care. They announced it before a pandemic. The pandemic hit. These vulnerable families became even more vulnerable. The opioid addiction got worse, yet this minister went ahead with it. I'm going to ask the minister to now answer the question that the Premier would not. Will you reverse the changes to cut these young people off supports when they so desperately need it?

2:00

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, this is incredibly important, and I would ask the member opposite to listen to the response. As we have said from the beginning, this is not about dollars; this is about young people and young adults who are transitioning into, many times, often more appropriate adult services. We need to make sure that we are supporting the transitions of these young people. As I have said at the beginning, no young adults have been transitioned off this program if it is not safe for them to do so. However, the vast majority have transitioned either into independence or into more appropriate adult programs. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

COVID-19 Vaccines for Children

Ms Hoffman: Yesterday the Premier said that there were 32 schools with active COVID cases, but two hours later we learned the truth, that 133 schools have active alerts and outbreaks, Premier. Still the Premier refuses to host vaccine clinics in schools, which would make life easier for parents and keep kids safer. We saw what happened when the government did half-measures and prematurely declared victory. It was a near collapse of our health care system and the deaths of thousands. Why won't the Premier do everything possible to make COVID-19 vaccines readily available for schools, have them in schools? Premier, why won't you?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the hon. member for the question. As we explained in our announcement yesterday, we're rolling out the vaccines for younger kids through 120 AHS clinics because that's the best fit for the scale on this campaign and the best way to serve younger kids. We're not doing it in schools, and other provinces generally aren't either, for a simple reason. Parents need to give consent at the time, so they need to come with their kids, and coming to the school doesn't offer much advantage over any other location. The suggestion that school clinics would give parents a break by saving them a trip to a clinic with their kids is simply incorrect.

Ms Hoffman: Who was incorrect yesterday was the Premier when he spread misinformation in his Chamber.

When we look at Saskatchewan, we see over 200 clinics, including more than 100 in schools, twice as many options for Saskatchewan families, and they have a quarter of our population. An effective vaccine program for kids means that we could give them stability rather than lurching from opening schools to closing schools as the Premier displays his incompetent leadership over and over again. Why won't the Premier pull out all the stops, make it as simple and convenient for families to get their children vaccinated? Why won't

he at least offer as much support and options to Alberta families as those . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier was absolutely correct. There were only 32 schools with active cases. What the member opposite was referencing is that, of course, schools stay on the alert list until 14 days have passed. Unfortunately, they don't know that information, or they're not clear on that information. I want to congratulate Alberta Health for rolling out a program which parents respect because it respects the authority of parents to choose whether they want to have their child vaccinated or not and to be present with their child when they get that vaccination.

Thank you.

Ms Hoffman: The Premier says that politics played no role in his decisions, but if we only look at his office and what they were doing, they were focused on selling hats while our ICUs were packed. The political interference taints every decision that his office makes. Today I'm already hearing confusion and frustration about the vaccine rollout from parents who are juggling work, trying to get their kids off to school, and sitting on 811 this morning hoping that they get to be one of the lucky few to get their kids in this week. You know what's not confusing? Putting vaccines in schools. We already do it, Premier. Why is it that the Premier is more intent on doing dog whistles to insiders than he is on getting kids vaccinated?

Mr. Copping: I appreciate that some parents may want their kids to be vaccinated in school without a parent being there, but many others would not. The reality is that the other provinces, including B.C. and Saskatchewan, are not doing clinics that way. A parent needs to be in place. Also, in B.C. they're using a similar process that we're using, high-throughput clinics. We've tried COVID clinics in schools, and the results simply were not there. Since May of this year AHS has offered to hold COVID vaccination clinics in about 1,300 schools with kids in the eligible age range. Seven hundred of those schools cancelled due to lack of interest or participation, and we did complete 591 but only 4,000 shots. Mr. Speaker, this is the . . .

Speaker's Ruling Oral Question Period Practices

The Speaker: Hon. members, it has come to my attention that there may be individuals tweeting from inside the Assembly. I accept the possibility that it might be a member of your team; however, if you're in the Chamber and your account is tweeting, that would be unparliamentary and against the rules.

Dow Chemical Canada Ethylene Plant Expansion

Mr. Walker: Mr. Speaker, our province has seen billions of dollars of investment in recent months, including many in our capital region. These include many investments in Alberta's Industrial Heartland, ranging from hydrogen to petrochemical to refineries and more. These are exciting investments for our energy sector as well as demonstrating Alberta's global leadership in emissions reduction. Can the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation tell the House what makes Alberta an attractive place for new investment?

Mr. Kenney: I'd like to thank the member for his passion for major industrial development east of Edmonton in the Industrial Heartland

area, and that is reaping dividends, Mr. Speaker. We have of course seen the Air Products new net zero hydrogen project announced, \$1.5 billion. Most excitingly, we've seen five hydrogen projects, many of them to be located east of the city, but the big whammy, the big whale: Dow Chemical, the largest private-sector investment in the Alberta economy in well over a decade, that will create thousands of jobs for people in the Edmonton region.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Premier. One of the biggest announcements came from Dow Chemical, who announced that they will be expanding their plastics facilities in Alberta. This investment will create jobs not only where the facility is located but also across the province as natural gas from our energy sector is used to create hydrogen and plastics and construction and operation jobs for my constituents in Sherwood Park. Can the minister tell the House what Dow's investment means for Alberta?

Mr. Kenney: I would say: a total game changer. Mr. Speaker, we can't announce the total dollar figure because it has not yet gone to a final investment decision. But if and when this proceeds, we are talking about the world's first net zero emitting ethylene cracker that will be producing products in demand across the world, bringing high-tech jobs and construction jobs here to Alberta, and this isn't happening by accident. We've been working with Dow for two and a half years. They told us that the job-creation tax cut brought them to the table because it made us competitive. The local top property tax cuts that we provided for, the petrochemicals incentive program, carbon capture utilization and storage, all of this: the recovery plan is bringing back the Alberta advantage.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Premier. With all these new investments it's obvious that Alberta is creating jobs and attracting investment as we move through and, hopefully, out of the pandemic. The Premier and Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation are responsible for Alberta's recovery plan, and I know that both have been burning the midnight oil, ensuring that Albertans can get back to work. To the Premier: how many jobs have been created in recent months in Alberta?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, 90,000 net new jobs since the beginning of the year, 65,000 net new jobs in the last four months. Alberta's unemployment rate dropped by nearly half a percentage point in October according to StatsCan. These are good, full-time, high-paying jobs. Increasingly businesses are telling us that their greatest challenge is labour shortages. We are second in the country in job growth this year; of course, first in the country in economic growth. The future is looking bright. Alberta's economy is back on a roll.

COVID-19 Vaccines for Children and Parental Leave

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, earlier this year the government willingly took our proposal to allow workers three hours of paid leave to get vaccinated. Now as vaccinations for five- to 11-year-olds open, we see that this law does not apply to designates. The minister may recall that we did talk about amending the legislation to allow for parents or caregivers to take three hours to help with getting people they're caring for vaccinated. My question is to the Minister of Health. Will you commit to working with us to bring forward

legislation to give parents three hours of paid vaccine leave so that they can get their kids vaccinated?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member knows, we worked jointly together to be able to put in three hours so that individuals could get vaccinated. I can tell the hon. member that we have expanded the hours for the vaccine clinics to be able enable parents to take their kids to be able to do this. We'll look through and see what numbers will come out, and then we'll be able to take a look at whatever measures we may need to do in the future.

2:10

Ms Gray: Given that vaccinations are a path out of the pandemic, given that we should pull out all the stops to make it easy and convenient for everyone to get vaccinated, given that the minister knows many leaves, like personal and family responsibility leave, apply in relation to a family member and given that this government should bring forward legislation to provide job-protected leave for parents to get their kids vaccinated – our caucus would work with you immediately to pass such – will the Minister of Health agree that giving parents time off to get their children vaccinated could improve vaccine uptake and access? Will you work with our caucus?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the hon. member for the question. As the hon. member knows, we did work together in terms of putting the three-hour paid leave for employees to be able to go get vaccinated. The issue is that we'll actually need to determine what the need is for this point in time and whether it needs to be expanded. We just rolled out the plan for vaccination through high-throughput clinics. These clinics are actually open long hours and over the weekends to be able to enable parents. We'll see what the uptake is going to be, and then we'll take a look at what other measures may or may not be needed.

Ms Gray: Given that we should put forward every good idea and action it and given that the government was able to introduce debate and pass the paid leave vaccination bill in 30 minutes after the call was made by the Leader of the Official Opposition and me and given that parents are already balancing so much and may put a critical vaccine appointment for their child off out of fear of facing retribution or losing wages and given that we already know the Premier is downplaying the importance of child vaccines, is the reason the minister won't commit to paid leave for parents seeking to get their kids vaccinated against the deadly COVID-19 virus because he's concerned about the stance of antivaxxers?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, I want to make sure that the hon. member is clear and this entire House is clear that we support vaccinations. We did the rollout yesterday in terms of vaccinations available for five- to 11-year-olds. One of my key mandates is increasing vaccination. We've had incredible success doing that over the last number of months, with the vaccination increase for those over 12 years old approaching 90 per cent. Again, every time we make a change in policy, we need to assess the need. At this point in time we're looking at the numbers that will be coming through, and then I'm happy to talk with the members opposite about potential . . .

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

Albertans' Access to Cabinet Ministers and the Legislature

Mr. Dang: Our Official Opposition has been inundated with stories from Albertans dealing with pain and suffering as a result of this Premier and the UCP government's failure to stop a preventable fourth wave of COVID-19; thousands of lives of lost, tens of thousands sick, and now countless critical surgeries being cancelled every single day. Albertans want their voices heard. They want to tell this government exactly how much pain and suffering they have caused. Can the Government House Leader please inform Albertans how they can get face time with himself or other members of the government cabinet? Albertans deserve to be heard.

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, surgeries are rising as COVID cases in the ICU come down and AHS expands capacity and moves the resources from ICU back into surgeries. Most recently AHS is completing over 75 per cent of surgeries compared to the normal pre-COVID level, and that includes 100 per cent of normal cancer volumes. My officials are supporting AHS in ramping up surgeries as fast as possible, potentially reaching 100 per cent of normal volume over the next few weeks. We'll continue to support them in reaching that.

Mr. Dang: Mr. Speaker, given that those are completely empty words from a government that refuses to listen to Albertans, given the horrific leadership and denial of democracy from this government in free fall, given that the UCP first fund raised against vaccine passports but ultimately introduced them because it increases vaccine uptake and keeps the public safe, given that vaccine passports are in place for hockey games, bars, concerts, and so much more, given that proof of vaccination still does not exist for this Legislature and given that the public has a right to come to this House and demand accountability for the pain and trauma this government has caused, does the Government House Leader support introducing a vaccine passport in this Legislature so we can allow members of the public access to this place?

Mr. Copping: As the hon. member knows, we responded to the fourth wave. We introduced a number of measures to be able to help stop the spread, and we introduced the REP program. Those measures and that program have been successful. The numbers continue to trend down in terms of the case numbers as well as hospitalizations and ICU. It's been challenging, Mr. Speaker, as we know, and I want to thank all the health care workers for stepping up and being able to provide services to Albertans. Our numbers are heading in the right direction, and we'll continue to support . . .

Mr. Dang: Given that this House belongs to the people of Alberta and given that we have vaccine passports nearly everywhere else but Albertans we're hearing from want to come here, want to come to the Legislature, and given that I wonder if this government wants to keep Albertans, to whom they have caused so much harm, away from the Legislature, will the Government House Leader prove me wrong and commit to signing a letter with me to the Speaker of the House requesting that the public be allowed access back to this Legislature?

The Speaker: I am certain that the hon. the Deputy Opposition House Leader is well aware of the rules of this Assembly, but bringing the Speaker into debate for any reason would be unparliamentary, so I'm sure he'll be brushing up on them.

The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to reiterate our government's commitment to protecting the health of Albertans, to have measures in place to slow down transmission. The measures we did put in place in September have been successful. The trend lines are coming down. Now we're turning our attention to surgeries. Those numbers are going up in terms of: we're not quite there yet, at 75 per cent, but we are focused on getting them to 100 per cent and then catching up on the backlog. We need to focus on Alberta's health and continue to support Alberta's health. That's a commitment that I make on behalf of our government, and that's a commitment that we will deliver on.

Technology Industry Development

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker, our government has overseen a renaissance in venture capital investment in Alberta; 2019, our first year in government, was a record year, and then we doubled that record in 2020, with over \$450 million in venture capital investment. Since then we've seen major investments from tech multinationals, including mCloud, Infosys, Mphasis, and our province's largest tech sector investment, from Amazon Web Services. Can the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation tell this House what the investment numbers for 2021 look like?

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

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that question. It's important to use a baseline to be able to measure the success and progress that you're making, so let's just take a year. Let's take 2018, the last year of the NDP government, as our baseline, with \$100 million of venture capital. Now let's take a look at how many times larger the venture capital this year is. It's not one, it's not two, it's not three – that would be a lot – it's not four, but it's five times larger already this year, and that's only through the first three quarters. It's most likely going to be six or seven times larger than the last year under the NDP.

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

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you five times to the minister for his answer. It's great to see that we've already set yet another record in venture capital investment. Despite this incredible growth and diversification the opposition recently claimed that tech investment has stalled under our government. Can the minister tell the House where our rising tech hubs of Calgary and Edmonton actually sit in the national rankings of tech investment?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, let's take another look at another baseline. In the last year of the NDP government, in 2018, we had 1,200 tech companies in Alberta. Fast-forward to 2020: over 3,000 tech companies in this province. Now, for the first time in its history, Edmonton is ranked in the top 50 in North America. Calgary is rising in the ranks as well, breaking into the top 30. We're attracting national and international investment into our tech sector. It's an exciting time to be in the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the minister for his response. With such strong investment and momentum, Alberta is becoming a destination or hub of choice for tech investment. We all know that it is the entrepreneurial spirit and innovation of Albertans that is making all of this possible. Can the

minister tell this House what companies are up and coming in Alberta's tech spaces?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now let's talk about the national and international platforms that are making new investments into Alberta. You have RBC's innovation hub. You've got Rogers making an engineering hub. You've got Mphasis, Infosys, global players, establishing a massive presence in the province of Alberta. Amazon Web Services is the largest technology investment in Alberta's history and happening right now. But, on top of that, are homegrown companies: Benevity, which is a unicorn. You have mCloud coming here. You've got Jobber, Neo. You've got Bitcoin. You could keep going here. You've got Athenian. It's groundbreaking in legal tech. It's optimistic. It's an exciting time.

Hydrogen Strategy

Ms Ganley: A few weeks ago the UCP released their hydrogen strategy to little fanfare, which isn't surprising given that the document was short on details and didn't provide one single new program that would support our hydrogen industry. Meanwhile countries around the world, including the United States, are moving aggressively to support the industry in a bid to take over market share as the industry quickly develops. Why is this government sitting back and putting up their feet with a mission-accomplished banner behind them while the rest of the world makes bold moves to support hydrogen?

2:20

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, I feel like that question should have come with a warning label. How disappointing. We are on the cusp of one of the greatest economic recoveries that this province has ever seen, and hydrogen will be on the absolute front of that forefront. We have put in a policy, the hydrogen road map, that will include meaningful, actionable levers that can be pulled to advance this economy, things like changing the natural gas utility act so that we can allow blending, creating a centre of excellence. We know our plan is working because we've seen five world-scale facilities.

Ms Ganley: Given that we were already a leader in hydrogen production in Canada under our government and we funded pilot projects to support the quickly growing industry and given that according to Air Products' press release they actually began work on their recently announced net zero hydrogen facility in 2018 and given that the UCP's hydrogen plan actually relies on programs that were already in place under previous governments, why does the government keep taking credit for other people's work? Are they out of ideas already, two and a half years into their mandate?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, once again the NDP will not allow the truth to get in the way of a good story. I can tell you that while they are technically correct that we were a leader in hydrogen already, we were a leader in grey hydrogen, which is carbon intensive. We are advocating a hydrogen road map that will put us as a leader in blue hydrogen technology. By the way, we know that our policy is working because we met with Northern Petrochemical a couple of weeks ago and they told us it was things like our low corporate tax rate, our Alberta petrochemical incentive program, and our reduced red tape.

Ms Ganley: Given that it wasn't your petrochemical incentive program and given that our plan supported the production of green hydrogen – check out albertasfuture.ca – but at the time the minister

said, "We could never produce green hydrogen here without using bottled water" but now he's adopted our approach and proclaimed himself agnostic on the colour of hydrogen and given that the Hydrogen Economist called our strategy last year a detailed plan and then the UCP chose to steal it for their road map, will the minister apologize for getting it so wrong, losing over two years that could have been spent diversifying our economy and creating good jobs?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to correct the record so that the hon. member can stop embarrassing herself. A couple of things here. The Alberta petrochemical incentive program was launched at the end of last year. The hydrogen road map: we spent a year in development, we spoke to industry experts, we spoke to academics, and we spoke to Indigenous organizations, utilities. The very idea that we would copy the NDP book report on hydrogen and use that for our strategy is ridiculous. We know our program is working, and we're excited. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Task Force on Homelessness

Ms Sigurdson: Poverty has skyrocketed under the UCP. They deindexed supports like AISH, made sweeping cuts to affordable housing, removed thousands from the shelter benefit, and they have refused to work with the federal or municipal governments on poverty alleviation. I was skeptical when I heard about the task force for homelessness action because I fear this will be only for optics. When this task force tells the Minister of Community and Social Services that the UCP's actions have increased poverty, will he commit to reversing his policies?

Mr. Luan: Mr. Speaker, when it comes down to taking compassionate care of some of the most vulnerable Albertans, our government has shown action after action. After weeks in the House talking about our budget commitment, last week the Premier and I announced \$21.5 million in additional support for shelters. On top of that, not only additional resources; we're tasking our new task force to look at how systemically we can work on a co-ordinated, comprehensive response to homelessness.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that the UCP already has a council for civil society and has struck panels in almost every ministry to simply justify prewritten plans – Albertans want action immediately; they do not want endless reports saying what we already know – and given that it is no surprise that child poverty was cut in half under the NDP and that more people had a place to call home because we invested over a billion dollars in housing, indexed AISH and income supports, and never made sweeping cuts impacting vulnerable Albertans, will the minister commit that the recommendations of this task force and their meetings will be public?

Mr. Luan: Mr. Speaker, when it comes down to taking concrete actions, I can't be more proud of this government. After all those already shared, there is another \$90 million in supportive housing units that we have allocated with what we call community-based initiatives. Not only are we addressing the shelters; we're also addressing how to transition people from a shelter to living in a community with support. With this task force, we're looking forward to made-in-Alberta solutions to care for some of the most vulnerable Albertans.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that there have been numerous insincere attempts by the UCP to address homelessness, this task force must

not be another one and given that poverty alleviation strategies were halted by the UCP – they reversed all the good work done by our government; ensuring everyone has a safe place to call home is more important than partisan differences – and given that at the Alberta Municipalities conference the minister said that new members could still be added to the task force, will the minister allow the NDP’s critic for Community and Social Services and myself, the critic for Seniors and Housing, to be members on that task force? We sincerely want the health and homelessness . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Mr. Luan: Mr. Speaker, when it comes down to tangible compassionate care for Albertans, we listen to the real stakeholders. Here’s one from His Worship the mayor of Edmonton: “We have identified the shelter gap in recent meetings with the Premier and his ministers, and they have responded.” Within two weeks, period. We’ll continue to stand strong to provide action after action to support the most vulnerable Albertans.

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

COVID-19 Vaccines and Health Care Workforce

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank our rural health care workers, who have worked selflessly throughout this pandemic, but they are worn out, and they are stressed. This has been made worse by labour shortages that have resulted in much heavier workloads. I have been in touch with several of our hard-working health care workers in my riding who are concerned about receiving the vaccine, but just as they have for the last 20 months, they still want to work to keep our health care system going strong. To the Minister of Health: with our current labour shortages, should Alberta Health Services keep its vaccine mandate?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Alberta Health Services brought in their vaccine mandate in order to ensure that Albertans could receive health care safely without the risk of getting COVID-19. I want to thank every AHS employee who has gotten vaccinated. Now, I’m happy to tell this House that currently 95.9 per cent of full- and part-time AHS staff have been vaccinated, including 99.8 per cent of physicians. Now, delivering health care safely is critical for our government, and we’ll continue to look at options to ensure that care continues to be available for Albertans when they need it and across the province.

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

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that the vaccine is just one way for us to reduce the spread of COVID-19, because we have other things like rapid testing, and given that rural Alberta was already experiencing labour shortages in health care well before the vaccine mandate was announced and given that Ontario and Quebec will not require health care workers to be vaccinated, to the same minister: what is the government doing to ensure that our rural health facilities have the employees they need now and in the years to come?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks again to the hon. member. Rural recruitment and retention is a long-running issue, so I fully appreciate the hon. member’s interest and concern

in this subject. The majority of staff with unconfirmed vaccination status are casual employees, 30 per cent of whom haven’t worked in the last 12 months. They are not expected to cause staffing challenges. Now, AHS has contingency plans in place to ensure patient care is not impacted. That includes looking at additional staffing and resources. We will ensure that there will be no disruption to services.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there have been cases of adverse reactions due to the COVID-19 vaccines such as severe rash, extended menstrual bleeding, and others and given that I’ve heard directly from constituents and health care workers saying that doctors are not addressing these reactions as adverse effects to the vaccine, which could be distorting the data used by Alberta Health Services, again to the Minister of Health: what is the process that doctors should go through if a patient believes that they are experiencing an adverse reaction due to the COVID-19 vaccine?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to be absolutely clear, before I answer the question, and state that vaccines are safe, that they are effective. We encourage every Albertan to go and get vaccinated and, if they have concerns, to go and get information and learn from a trusted source, like a health care provider, to learn more about the vaccines. Now, physicians have a crucial role in monitoring vaccine safety in Alberta, and that’s why every patient is advised to contact their physician immediately if experiencing adverse effects postimmunization. There is a form posted on the AHS website for physicians to use in reporting the adverse event, after which a dedicated adverse event team will investigate, and by law they must report this within three days.

Health Service Access and Conscience Rights

Member Irwin: Two years ago Bill 207, the Conscience Rights (Health Care Providers) Protection Act, failed. I was incredibly worried when the Member for Peace River introduced this bill as it would restrict access to abortion and health care for queer and trans Albertans. Thankfully, a whole lot of folks spoke up, including physicians and health care workers. Heck, even a few UCP MLAs voted against it, and the bill was defeated. Last weekend, however, that same Member for Peace River was again focused on conscience rights, and the UCP membership agreed with him. Will the Associate Minister of Status of Women commit now to protecting reproductive rights and the rights of 2SLGBTQ-plus people and, on the record, unequivocally reject conscience rights legislation?

Ms Issik: Mr. Speaker, this weekend, indeed, our party did have our convention, and members spoke and raised issues, voted on issues. I will tell you this, that every Albertan in this province has rights, including rights of conscience, including rights to their own decisions, and those rights will be protected for all by this government. I will tell you for certain that on the question of abortion, we know for certain that that has been decided in the Supreme Court of Canada.

Member Irwin: Given that when conscience rights were debated two years ago in committee, the Member for Cardston-Siksika made a terrible comparison of abortion to eugenics and given that I hear that this member was also championing changes to conscience rights policy last weekend but that the Alberta Medical Association,

health care professionals, so many Albertans overwhelmingly say that there is no need to change the current policy on conscience rights, will the Minister of Health state to this House that the current policy works and that he will not allow changes to it?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. You know, there was discussion during the AGM in regard to conscience rights and medical assistance in dying. All physicians and nurse practitioners in Alberta have always been able to voluntarily participate in providing medical assistance in dying to patients who meet all federal criteria. There is not now nor has there ever been in Alberta an obligation for physicians or nurse practitioners to participate in providing medical assistance in dying. The system was designed from the beginning to ensure conscience rights were honoured and protected, and this includes not having a requirement for a physician or a nurse practitioner to participate, but AHS does have a process so that those who need the service can get the service.

Member Irwin: Given that the current minister of rural economic development said that he could not support conscience rights legislation because he did not want to make access to rural health care worse and given that rural health care has faced many challenges because of the UCP, including doctors leaving, pandemic mismanagement, and nurses' wages being attacked, will the minister of rural economic development commit today to protecting access to health care in rural Alberta and standing up to rural members in his caucus that want to restrict it through conscience rights legislation?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, I fully appreciate the hon. member's concerns about access to services in rural areas and in certain areas where there's a challenge in actually attracting doctors and other health care practitioners. I want to say that we are committed to ensuring that Albertans have equitable health care and access to services, including all professions and physicians across the entire province. We've made significant investments to protect rural health care and recognize the unique challenges we find in rural areas, and our government is spending about \$90 million this year alone to address rural physician recruitment and retention. We'll continue to work on that to be able to provide the service that . . .

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

Parliamentary Secretary for la Francophonie

Ms Renaud: Mr. Speaker, after waiting months, the Premier yesterday appointed a parliamentary secretary for francophone Albertans. While I congratulate the member on his appointment, I have to say that the way it was announced was very disrespectful to francophones. Instead of using the francophone flag, a Quebec flag was used. Will the minister apologize for this lazy, insulting mistake and, as a way of making it up to the community, commit to keeping the francophone flag up for the entire month of March?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Culture.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. Yes, there was a mistake made there. I wasn't aware of it, but I did hear about it after, and it was very quickly rectified. But what I am excited to say is that we have appointed a new francophone parliamentary secretary, a guy who's excited about it. He's young. He comes from a community where there are many French people. He's a French speaker; he's already spoken here in the House. I think he's going

to do a fantastic job, and he'll get along well with all our French speakers in Alberta.

Ms Renaud: Après trois mois le gouvernement conservateur uni a finalement nommé un secrétaire parlementaire pour la francophonie albertaine, mais la promotion était avec le drapeau du Québec et pas le drapeau franco-albertain, qui est reconnu officiellement par le gouvernement albertain. Est-ce que le ministre ou le secrétaire parlementaire va s'excuser d'avoir insulté la communauté francophone pour cette erreur et faire une promesse aujourd'hui de garder le drapeau franco-albertain de tout le mois de mars, pour le mois de la francophonie albertaine?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Culture.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm really thrilled to continue to advise that we have appointed a new parliamentary secretary and that, in fact, he is French by choice. He's had a French immersion education. He is very committed to it. He wants to be involved not only with the language issues but also with cultural issues and is completely in support of our French community. He'll do a fantastic job.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Renaud: J'espère que le nouveau secrétaire parlementaire sera capable de maîtriser les attaques du gouvernement contre la communauté francophone, parce que les coupes budgétaires contre le Campus Saint-Jean sont dangereux et mettent en péril l'avenir de l'éducation française en Alberta. Est-ce que le ministre va se servir de son secrétaire parlementaire à écouter quand la communauté francophone dit que le nouveau programme d'études n'est pas inclusif ni respectueux des besoins de la communauté et le jeter et recommencer?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Culture.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, there are a lot of important issues. Education is part of them but also cultural issues. I understand that some of the questions in regard to Campus Saint-Jean – that is an issue before the courts. I'd also say that the new parliamentary secretary will be in touch with all of the different sectors within our province and will be reaching out to them. We've already advised the advisory council of his nomination, and conversations have already begun.

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

Trails Act

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The amount of good-news legislation introduced in the past week has been outstanding, one of which is Bill 79, the Trails Act, which will update how Alberta trails are managed and protected while also improving recreation experiences for all Albertans. I am glad to hear that the Trails Act will not in any way privatize Alberta's public lands. To the minister: how will Bill 79 help conserve and support trails for generations to come?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you. I'm pleased today to rise on behalf of the minister of environment. Alberta has hundreds of thousands of kilometres of unmanaged trails that cause environmental damage and public safety concerns across the province. Our trail framework needs to be modernized. Today trails are more popular than ever with Albertans, so popular that we need new and updated tools to

manage them. We rely upon volunteers to help maintain recreational trails on public land. The Trails Act will strengthen trail partnerships with volunteer organizations so that we can all continue to enjoy Alberta's trails.

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for that answer. Given that some groups criticize Bill 79, accusing the legislation of breaking promises by not introducing a \$30 trail fee, and given that I have also heard from a lot of my constituents regarding the OHV fees and user fees for areas not included in the Kananaskis pass and given that these fees are also not explicitly referenced in the Trails Act, to the minister: can you provide greater clarity about why the Trails Act did not introduce a trails fee?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Trails Act is not actually about fees. The Public Lands Act amendments last spring allow fees and came with the introduction of the \$30-per-adult public land camping pass. We will ensure with that act that four-by-fours are paying the same fees as OHVs to access trails on public land. The Trails Act allows different user groups to sit down at the same table to resolve conflicts and protect trail infrastructure.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the minister. Alberta has around 13,000 kilometres of designated trails but many more kilometres of unmanaged trails. Given that managing both designated and unmanaged trails is essential and further given that we must strengthen enforcement tools to prevent environmental damage and promote stewardship, to the same minister: what kind of impact will the Trails Act have on areas like McLean Creek and its users?

The Speaker: The Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Trails Act improves science-based environmental stewardship for existing and new trails like those at McLean Creek. It also has provisions for enhanced protection of wildlife and habitats along with extensive consultation with local trail users. That's why groups like the Alberta Hiking Association and the Alberta TrailNet Society support this legislation. The act strengthens protection of trails with provision of better user information, education, and enforcement so that Albertans can continue to enjoy their trails.

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

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite copies of a report written by Jessica Hermary. She is a student at the University of Alberta, which is in my riding. She has recently won the Canadian Agricultural Economic Society undergraduate book prize for high academic achievement. In her report she does talk about concerns over the minister of environment's comments in this House on November 17, 2021, that are inaccurate, and she has written them correctly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? Hon. member, are you rising for a tabling? A tabling from the hon. Member for Calgary-South East, followed by Cypress-Medicine Hat and then Lac St. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Jones: Yeah. Yesterday, while introducing second reading of Bill 84, I made reference to a *National Post* article. I'm tabling the required copies.

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

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Another Alberta daily writing about the UCP AGM. The theme of this article is that it doesn't matter whether there were 1,100 or 1,600 people in the room. What does matter is that this Premier is still polling at the lowest of all Premiers in Canada.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Getson: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. One is from a constituent concerned about effects to a family member with Bell's palsy on receiving the vaccination. The other one was on the effect to a high school teacher with breast cancer who was walked off the job because she didn't want to take the vaccination.

The second tabling is from a medical practitioner talking about the impacts in a testimony. He himself has heart conditions. The side effects: he had found that they were too much of a risk for him. He and his family have already had COVID and are testing off the charts in serology. The concern was that he was not receiving an exemption.

The third tabling is testimony by another doctor to that same effect, on having these issues.

Here are the requisite copies.

The Speaker: Hon. members, please, someone circle the calendar. There were no points of order today. It puts a jump in my step.

As such, we are at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 86

Electricity Statutes Amendment Act, 2021

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

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move second reading of Bill 86, the Electricity Statutes Amendment Act, 2021.

This act is another step to modernize our electricity system so that investors will see an innovative system that can accommodate new technological developments. These modernizations can be made while ensuring our electricity system remains safe, reliable, and affordable for all Albertans. With this approach we can meet the evolving needs of consumers and investors.

If passed, the Electricity Statutes Amendment Act will help address the changing ways that electricity producers and consumers interact with and use Alberta's power grid. It will encourage new investment and innovative technologies and support the establishment of a planning framework while maintaining our overarching requirement that infrastructure costs borne by Alberta ratepayers be reasonable and fair. The act addresses gaps in our current legislation that are barriers to investment for new projects and will encourage

innovations that will improve grid reliability and flexibility, which will help all Albertans.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Specifically, the act enables integration of energy storage into Alberta's interconnected electric system as a technology that can participate in the competitive electricity market or the regulated transmission and distribution systems. This technology offers proponents and generators a significant degree of flexibility in how they can meet their electricity needs, which will allow them the freedom to meet those needs in the most efficient manner. With the flexibility of both location and scale, energy storage has the potential to enhance the efficiency and resilience of the Alberta interconnected electric system for both the planning and operational perspectives. These assets can provide efficient and effective transmission and distribution services that can, in some circumstances, be more cost-effective and easier to implement than a wire solution requiring new infrastructure, the cost of which is often passed on to repairs.

The act also enables unlimited self-supply with export, the ability to generate electricity on-site, to sell any surplus to the grid, and to draw from the grid when required. This piece will be particularly appealing for larger industrial-scale operations. It removes restrictions that limited adoption of this technology while ensuring that all system participants continue to cover the fair share of transmission system costs.

There was widespread support for the adoption of unlimited self-supply with export among stakeholders as they believe it will support investment growth and innovation across the economy. By providing industry with clear regulations and policy, increased self-supply with export projects will result in generation competition that should help reduce electricity costs and improve system reliability over time.

In light of these technologies and other emerging consumer trends, planning and co-ordination is critical to ensure that the retirement of existing assets and the introduction of new technology take place in an orderly, efficient, and cost-effective manner. Going forward, competitive forces will be relied upon to develop many of the distributed energy resources, including residential solar, battery storage, and electric vehicle charging that are transforming the electricity sector on a global scale. We want to allow industry to lead the way and do what they do best through a competitive market.

To ensure that Alberta's distribution system can effectively accommodate these changes, the Electricity Statutes Amendment Act will require distribution system owners to prepare electric distribution system plans in accordance with future regulations. The act would also give the Minister of Energy regulation-making authority, which ensures government can provide further guidance around the planning framework as needed. Proactive planning of grid modernization should provide for better cost management and long-term savings for ratepayers. It is essential to ensure the system continues to meet the evolving needs of consumers in an orderly and efficient manner.

While the amendments within the act are not expected to have any impact on utility costs for consumers in the short term – and the reason for that, Mr. Speaker, is that we have to pay off the investments that have been made. Under the four years of NDP government there was over \$4 billion worth of infrastructure that has to be paid by the ratepayer. They also experienced \$1.3 billion of Balancing Pool losses that also have to be paid off by the ratepayer. Those costs have to be paid, but we do believe that this legislation will set the stage for longer term benefits for all ratepayers as

increased competition and consumer choice will be enabled. I can't stress enough that we believe that is the path forward for lower energy prices, increased choice, and more competition for ratepayers.

2:50

A number of consequential amendments to existing acts are also required to support implementation, specifically the Hydro and Electric Energy Act, the Electric Utilities Act, and the Alberta Utilities Commission Act. Amendments to the Hydro and Electric Energy Act and the Electric Utilities Act are needed to establish a formal definition for energy storage in Alberta's legislative framework for the electricity sector. This fundamental step builds energy storage into the legislation and sets the conditions under which operators can employ this technology. It will also allow distribution and transmission utilities to own and/or operate energy storage assets under specific conditions and limit these assets to providing services within the regulated distribution or transmission segments of the electricity system. Furthermore, it will allow and encourage competitive models to be employed, in most instances, in procuring distribution and transmission services from market participants, ensuring best results for all.

The Electric Utilities Act will also be amended to include the definition of self-supply with export and will enable market participants to partake. This means proponents would have the ability to generate unlimited electricity on their own sites, to sell any surplus to the grid, and to draw from the grid when they require it. This creates new opportunities for the proponents, including wealth generation and emissions reduction, while in some cases also offering dispatchable energy to the grid.

The act will also be amended to specify that electric energy produced or stored in the service area of the city of Medicine Hat is not applicable under the act as originally established in 1995. This is because the city has always been self-sufficient in meeting the electricity needs of its customers in its service area through its own system, and as such, the generating capacity that the city can hold is limited to the amount required to reliably meet the needs of its customers as per section 95 of the Electric Utilities Act.

In keeping with our balanced approach to system costs, the act ensures that consumers who choose to adopt self-supply while also maintaining a connection to the grid can be charged a just and reasonable share of transmission system costs in accordance with the approval of the Alberta Electric System Operator tariff. This change ensures that all market participants pay their fair share of transmission costs and that costs of these developments are not just shifted onto other ratepayers.

The Electric Utilities Act will be amended to help establish the framework for long-term co-ordination and planning of the distribution system. This will include a requirement for distribution system owners to prepare electric distribution system plans in accordance with future regulation, to be developed by the government in consultation with stakeholders. Accordingly, the act also provides the Minister of Energy with regulation-making authority. This will allow government to provide further guidance around the planning framework such as objectives and purposes of the plan, information requirements, and timing, frequency, and the sharing of the plans.

The Alberta Utilities Commission Act will require amendments to clearly state that the commission may receive and approve an application for an energy storage facility if the application meets the relevant commission rules and requirements and will incorporate formal definitions of energy storage in the act.

Our approach to the developments within the electricity sector is measured, responsible, and pragmatic and will create a system that welcomes innovation and investment. It limits the risk of

overregulation and unnecessary red tape while ensuring that the regulatory regime will be responsible and appropriate and opens doors for new investment. Mr. Speaker, I am proud to tell you that the Alberta Utilities Commission has reduced 42 per cent of the red tape.

The Electricity Statutes Amendment Act represents a step forward in the overall development of Alberta's modern electricity system to support our diversifying economy. It builds on recommendations from consumer groups, industry stakeholders, agencies, and investors, and it positions Alberta to manage and co-ordinate the development of the system and to gain maximum value from its assets.

I hope that all members support me in moving forward with Bill 86. Alberta is on the cusp of one of the greatest economic recoveries that our province has ever seen. This is the electricity system that will power that industry forward and with the modernizations that are required. With the amendments in Bill 86 we can achieve just that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members who wish to – I believe the hon. member who caught my eye was the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the most pressing issues facing Albertans and Alberta families is rapid inflation and looming energy poverty because of the rising costs of fuel, heat, and electricity. As we all know, when it comes to electricity, the cost can be broken down on two sides, the cost of generating the electricity and the cost of transmission and distribution. For a growing number of Albertans, the cost of electricity now pales in comparison to the cost of transmission.

Mr. Speaker, the number of Alberta families that call my office from everywhere and reach out about how hard it is to accept all the extra charges on the utility bills when it's hard to pay for the other basics, when the carbon tax has added considerable hardship – I think of irrigated farmers that tell me that they can pay as high as \$3,000, \$4,000, \$5,000 a quarter just in carbon tax, which has created hardship on their operations, which ends up being passed on to families. It has created a hardship, energy poverty on our families.

Despite promising to protect coal communities and coal jobs, once this government took office it did an abrupt about-face and basically adopted the former government's plan to phase out coal for electric generation. Basically and identically, the government of Alberta has determined to take the Justin Trudeau approach to climate change: use carbon taxes to force the premature closing of all coal facilities regardless of the stage in the life cycle that they are at. One of the major problems with using carbon taxes to increase the cost of coal-powered electricity is that it doesn't automatically make the other alternatives competitive.

All the windmills and solar panels in the world don't provide the reliability or the cost efficiency of scrubbed coal or the backup necessary. Mr. Speaker, today these technologies simply aren't ready to do that heavy lifting. As a direct result, this government's policies are driving up the cost of electricity for consumers, for farmers, for ranchers, and for businesspeople, especially now with the cost of natural gas spiking.

Meanwhile our grid is importing electricity and effectively exporting jobs. Mr. Speaker, I'm guilty of spending too much time on Twitter, no doubt, but one of the times I just get so frustrated is when the Twitter crowd gets antsy when they see that the Alberta people, the Alberta government, are actually importing electric generation from coal-fired electricity in Montana. It gets people

hoppy. People wonder about the hypocrisy. They wonder about the cost. They wonder about how we ended up here.

In Ontario we've already seen the second part of the approach take effect with a campaign to vilify natural gas-powered electricity. This campaign, Mr. Speaker, will come to Alberta as well. As I cautioned when in opposition, you cannot buy social licence from people who profit from killing natural resources no matter how much you try, no matter how much you pay. Will Bill 86 solve that problem? Well, provisions that allow people to produce their own electricity and sell it back to the grid might help. I caution. I talked to one great entrepreneur who, with greenhouses and food production, was telling me that his cost to sell back into the grid was one and a half million times greater than if he'd have been in a neighbouring jurisdiction.

3:00

I sure hope that this government actually cares about our competitiveness and our families and our food production and makes sure that we strike the proper balance there. But, by and large, Mr. Speaker, this bill has nothing to do with reducing the costs for consumers. The hon. minister just said that in the short term it's not going to do a single thing on either the electricity or the transmission and distribution side. What Bill 86 does instead is that it effectively gives the minister direct control over any expansion of the grid. And under these amendments the minister will dictate all regulations respecting the purpose of distribution system plans.

Mr. Speaker, what that means is that the minister can fast-track projects for political gain. Exactly the type of province we do not want to live in: the minister can delay projects for regions that don't support the government's vision. Perhaps worst of all, he can ram projects through the planning stages in areas that don't want them, aren't ready for them, want to pursue other alternatives. If this all sounds too familiar to rural Albertans, it should. It was the former PC government's decision to ram through power line projects that first brought the Wildrose Party to prominence in Alberta. Bill 50, the Redford government, and the attack on property rights failed that 44-year PC dynasty, and here we go again.

Bill 50, with all the opposition that that raised – and I take zero gain in saying, you know, that these people were right when now so many families face energy poverty. I campaigned for the UCP in the last election to make sure property rights were restored and to ensure that such a blatant misuse of power would never happen again, but here we go. The government trying to give itself more direct power over our electrical system, rather than letting the market dictate when, where, and how distribution projects will proceed, is a recipe for disaster. I would like to remind all members of this Assembly that centralizing power in your preferred government only remains advantageous to you as long as your government is re-elected.

Mr. Speaker, I don't have to remind you of the last 10 months of the polls. The odds that this particular government will be re-elected are slim. If you wouldn't give these powers to your opposition, you darn well better take a long hard look at giving them to yourselves. I have great concerns with this government. I have great concerns with this bill.

I thank everyone for your time.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's always a pleasure to rise in this place, and at this point we are debating Bill

86, the Electricity Statutes Amendment Act, 2021. Thank you to the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity, the Member for Morinville-St. Albert, for bringing it forward to this place this afternoon. My hope is that we will have an opportunity to have some questions asked and answered, as I imagine all members of this place have had concerns raised with them around affordability in general and, specifically, around electricity affordability.

It was Friday that I was visiting and notarizing some papers for constituents who need to apply for additional income supports to do their best to be able to keep their home given the cuts that they received from their provincial funding. I was trying to help them access their own pension early because they talked about how the removal of many of the provincial programs and specifically the emergency housing benefit for them is the difference between them having \$320 a month to live on or \$20 a month to live on. Specifically, when I asked about some of the biggest cost pressures facing them, they talked about their electricity rates. They don't live in an opulent home; they live in a sub ground level, you know, main floor, sunken level apartment in a walk-up on a busy street in my riding. But they have a lovely home, and they want to stay in that home. When I asked a little bit about some of their electricity pressures, they talked about how their bill had doubled in the last few months. It wasn't because they had more technology. It's because a lot of the additional fees on the bill had gone up, and, of course, the rates had also gone up.

I hope that we are in this place bringing forward solutions to everyday families and their pressures. Upon first read – because we're only in second – I have to say that I am hopeful that that's where this bill is going to take us. I think that it does address a few areas that we haven't really dealt with in legislation before. If this is implemented well, it could potentially have positive benefits on the grid. Of course, the grid isn't my number one driver; people are, so making sure that that family can stay in their home. With the reduced supports for housing and home security that they're already being saddled with by this government, we can at least do something to try to make their fixed costs a little less burdensome.

We know that too many Albertans are already being forced to choose between paying higher rents, higher gas bills, higher food costs, higher utility bills and that families are seeing many pressures on their individual bank accounts as a result of a variety of choices made by this government.

Some of the questions that I'd love to have the minister or a designate engage with a little bit here this afternoon and certainly in subsequent readings are: what generally is the government's plan for rising costs of living, the increased pressures that individual families are facing, especially as it relates to heating and electricity costs? Generally, like, what is the big picture? Obviously, I hope that this bill ties in to achieving those ultimate goals. But what are the targets that we're hoping to achieve in terms of reducing pressure on household budgets?

I can tell you that seeing a doubling in the cost of electricity over the last two years for this couple, a couple that has a smallish but lovely home, is a big pressure. They would like to see their bills moving in the opposite direction, not increasing. While their income supports are being cut, seeing their costs going up causes a huge burden on this couple.

In terms of Bill 86 I appreciate that there's a section around enabling energy storage, and I'm wondering: how will nonwired be defined? I think we do have a section on wired and nonwired. And what are the goals of how much storage will be brought onto the grid? Again, this is good news. I think that creating space and having guidelines within legislation around the storage piece is important. I just want to know, basically, what our goals are for how

much storage we think we will require and where that's taking us as a province.

Also, I think our caucus would appreciate knowing how the government is going to be sure that Albertans can capitalize on some of the demands . . . [interjection]. Oh, if the minister would be willing to respond to those early questions, I'd really appreciate it.

Thank you.

Mr. Nally: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. member for some good questions there. The member is absolutely correct. We left the definition of energy storage deliberately open. We had a definition for energy storage, and it was hydro. That was the definition that was in place for years. But the technology changed, and the definition did not change with it. We don't want to hamstring ourselves for future technological advancements, so we've kept the definition fairly wide so that there could be new technologies down the road. Like I said, the minister will have regulation-making authority. If it's too wide, for example, certainly that could be brought in at a later date.

In terms of how much energy storage – you know what? – the market will decide. If energy storage can be deployed as a nonwired solution, cheaper, it will be the market that drives that.

Thank you.

3:10

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for engaging on those early questions.

To flow from that, I guess, I think many of us would like to have more confidence that we have more energy security and that we don't need to hear more stories like the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat just raised around transmission coming from south of the border, north of the border. I know that we are very proud energy leaders in North America, and I think being able to meet our energy demands and electricity demands, both, would make good sense. I think many of us would probably be keen to see us have increased capacity for storage and increased electricity security as well as we continue to move forward.

Does the minister have an estimate as to how much the government expects Albertans to save over the next decade in terms of transmission cost? We're hoping that there will be a transmission cost reduction due to nonwired alternatives and that people won't have to pay as much for transmission. I guess, globally, how much do we think that would mean in terms of savings to Albertans in general but also if we have any estimates on what it could mean for an average household? I know that those pressures that people regularly see on their bills: it's frustrating when they don't feel like they're benefiting from transmission. They just want to be able to turn their lights on, run their dishwasher, and relax at night.

Thank you. [interjection]

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. It's hard to ascertain a number on how much we're going to save because of the technological advancements that are happening every day. Here's what I can tell you. Every day that we move forward, we pay off more of those transmission costs, making it cheaper for ratepayers. So if we can pay off those transmission costs at a time when we're able to employ this infrastructure, nonwired solutions, for less money, that will have an effect long term of driving down ratepayers' costs. We know that transmission costs are high. The path forward, of course, is to pay off the investments that have been made and to bring forward cheaper, nonwired solutions, and that's what this does.

In terms of the dollar amount it would be a guess to speculate the amount, but we are confident that this is a good first step in the longer term in bringing down costs for consumers.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you. Sorry, Mr. Speaker; something stuck in my throat this afternoon. In terms of paying off the transmission costs, I guess one of the questions I have – because I am hopeful, and it seems like it will result in long-term, long down the road cost savings, but I really do hope that there aren't increased short-term pressures that families are facing. Certainly, now is not the time to be seeing increased pressures. If the minister was able to give some assurances that there won't be short-term increases to pay for long-term savings and, also, if we can have some information shared about what the estimate is on the timeline for paying off the transmission build and how this might change that, who it is that's going to be impacted. If we're paying it off faster, does that mean we're paying more in a shorter term rather than amortizing it over a longer term?

I think that those things are – most Alberta families want their bills to go down right now, and any information we could have to show that the government is actually making that the priority in this bill I think would help me feel more confident in where I hope to land, which is on the supporting side of this legislation, just having that increased confidence that we're not talking about short-term increases for long-term savings. [interjection]

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for making way. This will not raise costs in the short term. That's the good news. More good news is that long term it will bring down costs. We know that the path forward for lower electricity costs is through increased choice and more competition, and that's what will drive consumers' bills down. This does that. This does that with nonwired solutions.

Also, something that we haven't really talked about is that it will allow for arbitrage in the marketplace. Arbitrage in the marketplace means that you buy cheap electricity at night and sell it back into the marketplace during the day. That, again, will contribute to increased supply, more choice, more competition, driving down costs. Self-supply and export will also contribute to more power in the electricity grid, therefore offering more choice, more competition, and driving down costs.

This will not drive up costs short term, but it will lower costs long term. I hope that answers the questions.

Ms Hoffman: I certainly hope that to be the final outcome. I know that we were told that there would be a lot of savings with the deregulation of the market, and that definitely hasn't been the lived experience of many Alberta families over the last 20 years when it comes to their electricity bills and what they're individually paying.

I want to thank the minister for the back and forth on this portion. I think that's exhausted our three for this speaking opportunity, but I do think that this is one of the benefits of the change in the standing order, when we have ministers that engage through the various stages and do work to answer questions. I want to say how much I appreciate it personally as a member of this place, through you, Mr. Speaker, of course.

To summarize, I think that the bill addresses a few main issues. The energy storage, which the minister has previously identified, previously was undefined, and that's largely because energy storage has traditionally not been a factor of electricity grids here in Alberta, and of course the piece around hydro highlights why. Other provinces have a much more robust hydro sector than we have the opportunity for here in Alberta, but we do have many other excellent energy and electricity feed-in sources, including, of course,

renewables, that are growing in our province every day. The definitions seem to enable energy storage projects, and I think that that is probably good news.

Any time we have to wait until regulations, I'm always a little bit nervous because I know that sometimes things happen. We've seen evidence of that particularly as it relates to electricity and risk being downloaded from large corporations onto individuals through changes in regulation that weren't properly consulted on through the public, so I am a little bit hesitant when I see that things will be defined in regulation. I understand that sometimes that needs to be the case. I sincerely hope that this government is far more open and transparent around the development of regulations as it relates to electricity than we saw, particularly in the '90s, under former Conservative governments.

The lack of definition previously prevented effective regulations and made energy storage projects uneconomic, and I appreciate that that's one of the problems that's attempting to be solved here today. I think this will also allow energy storage to be integrated into distribution and transmission, which could hopefully help lower costs over time. I know that we would all like to see that in the short term, so it's hard to hold out hope for down the road, but that ultimately is my goal. I take the minister at his word when he says that he thinks that it will work in this instance. We just haven't always seen the benefits of competition as it's been promised to Albertans in the electricity market. In fact, we've seen a lot of Albertans face significant increases in their bills, so I am hopeful, but I am not naive to some of the realities that individual families have faced over the last few decades.

I do think that energy storage is something that's important for us to be able to engage in and discuss, and I think that how the technology is continuing to evolve is certainly very good news for Albertans and for the planet. I think that when we look at some of the research that's being done around batteries and capacity to be able to store electricity for long-term initiatives, it's very good news. Yes, selling back to the grid and buying in is one of the ways that we can support connectivity and power one another, and so is increasing our capacity for individual storage and collective storage. I think that we are blessed to be in a province where we've been an energy leader, and I hope that that continues to be the case as it relates to all energy needs, including our electricity needs here in the province.

I will also say that you don't realize how dependent you are on things like electricity until you don't have it. I also spend some time on Twitter, like the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, and when the power goes off in our neighbourhood, which only happens a few times a year, the number one thing I look to is the seniors' residence across the way because there's always somebody up around the clock in that seniors' residence, and if all the lights are off, I'm confident the power is down. The second thing I look to is social media, because our neighbourhood is so interconnected, and find ways to try to troubleshoot. The next thing we look to is the EPCOR website because that seems to be the third place for information sharing.

Certainly, I think that all Albertans rely deeply on electricity. I think that for those who are houseless, their needs for electric support as well are growing. A shout-out to some of the folks who live in my neighbourhood who've been putting up little benches in front of their homes and also adding little solar-powered charging stations for people to be able to stop and power their phones. Those are used regularly by people who are houseless and also by teenagers who are making their way home and didn't plan to charge their phone ahead of time and need to stop, have a little rest, charge their phone, and then keep on their way. I think that many Albertans are finding ways to support one another through this difficult time.

3:20

I'm at this point still hopeful that this Electricity Statutes Amendment Act, 2021, will find ways to make life a little bit more affordable for us. Again, I'm thinking about that couple in particular who is, you know, on the cusp of being able to keep their home or not. One of the pressures that they're facing, of course, is the reduced compensation for helping them pay their rent from this province, and another one is the fixed pressures that they feel, including their electricity costs, so anything we can do – I just can't imagine right now living off \$320 a month once they've paid their basic needs and, down the road, only \$20 a month. Like, I just don't know how anyone is supposed to be able to do that, and that's without having bought food, right? That's without having bought a bus pass.

Like, times are really tough and really tight for a lot of Alberta families right now, so I'm hopeful that we are in this place focusing on what we can do to keep people housed, keep people warm and safe, keep people connected, keep the electricity flowing, and keep each other as the driver when we're making decisions in this place. It's certainly the people of this province who have sent us here, and it's the people who, I believe, need to always be at the front of our consciousness when we're here making decisions.

Once again thank you to the minister for engaging in some back and forth on those questions that I raised early in debate. I really appreciate when we're able to strike that type of a tone. I think it's good for democracy, I think it's good for decision-making, and I think it's a healthy workplace when we engage in this way.

Thank you again, Mr. Speaker, and to my colleagues for the debate so far on Bill 86.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I believe the hon. member who caught my eye is the hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd love to talk about Bill 86. Actually, it's going to be a lot of questions that I have for the minister. A little background: you know, everyone has heard about me working on major projects. One of the jobs I got to work on towards the latter part when I was at Enbridge was the Montana tie-line, that was bringing in a high-voltage transmission power line from Great Falls up to Lethbridge, and then we were producing a ton of green energy up there, 350 windmills on that side of it. I also worked on projects up in the territories, where the only way you got electricity was good, old-fashioned Cat power in the middle of the tundra. So I understand, as the member opposite was talking about, the need for power in remote locations.

I'm really excited to hear about the energy storage potential of it. Minister, quite frankly, we can produce power; we don't have a way to store it. So this is fantastic, to start looking at new, emerging technologies, whether you're using off-peak power to pump it uphill and use it with gravity and come down that way, through run-of-the-river, those types of concepts, or whether it's through dams or capacity. The other one is thermal energy storage, you know, once you start looking at trying to minimize your heating sources and costs and looking at off-peak hours.

Some of the items that came up for comments, though – and I'm looking up at Zama City, so we're talking about these economic corridors. This is going to be a little bit nonconventional, Minister. We're looking at radical collaborations, and we start trading routes, and we start tying in and doing connections interprovincially as well. There's potential in areas where we don't necessarily have to build from the south up; we might be able to build from the north down. I'm not sure if that's been considered in the equation.

As an example, the Northwest Territories is going to be building out tons of nice, great, green energy power. They need access to get to their mining assets, their concentrates, and they're looking at potentially, if they could broker it or talk under this agreement, maybe some others, moving along those corridors, tying in their power grid to our northernmost part, and then we can trade materials going back and forth. Consequently, if we're trying to get lines over to Churchill, maybe there's something that we can look at for the oil sands up in that area rather than building out the infrastructure.

I'm not sure how this addresses when we're talking about potential small modular or microreactors, and then we actually have in-site or microgeneration and facilities and locations that act like little islands without having to build that out. The oil field got back to me and early on during the red tape had a few different roundtables. [interjection] Yes, Minister.

Mr. Nally: Thank you. It sounded like you had a question there, so I thought I would do an intervention. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, through you to him. The member was asking about distributed energy. It could be anything like small modular reactors. It can be rooftop solar charging stations. That type of distributed energy is technology that's been around for a number of years, but we really don't have any type of planning around it. To manage costs and keep costs down, we are putting forward this legislation, and it will allow for the Minister of Energy to have regulation-making authority in that space so that we can actually better plan for things like distributed energy. Now, the regulation-making authority has not happened, and I would say to the hon. member that the answer is consultations, which will be coming very shortly, and then we'll see that the regulations will be developed in early 2022. The bottom line is that this legislation will allow for more distributed energy.

Mr. Getson: Thanks for that, Minister. Please feel free – there are going to be a few here. I've just put down some speaking points myself on conversations that came up, getting to understand the bill better as we go through the areas in the House and have this collaborative debate back and forth.

One of the items that the oil field was telling me oftentimes was that they can produce a lot of power, and some of the regulations behind the fence: literally, if they weren't producing 100 per cent power going back to the grid, they were then not allowed to tie to the grid. So what they were doing essentially is wasting electricity, wasting energy, cooking it off in the fields because there was no place for it to go. It sounds like this is starting to acknowledge that, recognize it, so you don't have to be 100 per cent tied in. You can do your peak storage and do that, so that's wonderful to hear if that is the case.

Depleted areas. Up in Zama City, with those economic corridors, again, they don't have enough electricity up there. They don't have enough energy to run both kilns at the same time. It's stymieing the production, so looking at new, novel ways of looking at energy storage, tying in this infrastructure makes a ton of sense.

One of the other items that came up – and I'm not sure if it needs a little bit more work or not. Each industry kind of has their own nuances when it comes to their energy agreements. The forestry industry, both up in Yellowhead and in my constituency, had some strong reservations about this bill, so I'm not sure if that was managed or worked through. Their concern, Minister, was that their cost of power had been increasing over the years. I'd argue to say that it was 200 to 300 per cent. They were concerned that costs, if it wasn't offset, then would go up even further. Their concerns on that were that behind-the-fence generation was then also going to be taxed or charged at that higher rate. The concern that they had was that this was going to price them out competitively. It would

also start to draw concerns on their capital expenditures. Quite frankly, they can go to a different jurisdiction, spend less for their power, which is south of the border, still keep their current operations here.

So I think we have to look at how we can take care of potentially some of these specific industries. I mean, I told them that if I was them, I could threaten, basically, that if I pulled the plug on the power supply, just kept it all behind the fence, then the rest of the ratepayers would have to make up for it, which would be a massive disparity for the consumption of the power because the transmission systems were in for that. [interjection] If the minister has an intervention on the forestry file, I'd really love to hear that one.

Mr. Nally: Thank you for making way. Mr. Speaker, through you to the hon. member, I appreciate the question. I can say that we have been having many consultations with industries across the province, including the forestry companies, because, quite frankly, it's an important industry to Albertans. It generates a lot of revenue for the province. It creates a lot of jobs for Albertans. It's an important industry, and it's an industry that we will not abandon. We're continuing to have conversations with the forestry companies because we want to make sure that this legislation will enhance what they do and not be detrimental to what they're doing.

With respect to the other question the hon. member had, about self-supply and export, the hon. member is absolutely correct. This will allow companies to produce energy on-site for themselves. Also, if there's any extra, they will be able to sell it back into the grid, creating a further revenue stream for them. That's exactly what the intent of this legislation is.

Thank you.

Mr. Getson: Thanks to the minister for answering those. I'm really looking forward to going through this bill more fulsomely. I understand some of the concerns from the opposite side and some of our own members, honestly, on not having everything prescript in the bill, but I like the idea of kind of putting the framework together and knowing that this is going to be malleable as different technology comes forward, as we do those consultations with industries to find out their specific niche and their issues, that we've allowed that latitude within the regulations to suit and, moreover, not to box ourselves into a corner as we go forward with this act and we put it in place so we can have that. That's beneficial both for the ag, forestry, oil and gas sectors as well any of those manufacturing, fabrication facilities, petchem, all those big energy users, because, again, we can get the windfalls.

The last comment I would have for the minister if he wishes to intervene on it. Now I'm going to lose my train of thought. How does this new bill take into context the potential issues we had before, where it was motivated to put up power-generating facilities? Then the opposite side of the equation didn't really address as fully as it could the transmission costs of trying to get the power to those regions. There was a bit of an imbalance in that equation, if you would. Motivated to put up power plants, but then the back side was that the ratepayers were paying for potentially longer transmission lines. I'm not sure if the minister would like to reply.

3:30

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member said that he's at risk of losing his attention. I'm at risk of losing a few pounds from getting up and down today, but happy to do it. Yeah. Listen, this legislation is about modernizing the electricity grid, and it will absolutely help us manage costs in the future. The distribution regulation-making authority for the Minister of Energy will allow

us to better manage those distribution costs. Having energy storage as a nonwire solution will lower those costs because it can often be deployed cheaper, not always but in many cases, and we will always default to the competitive, more affordable option for Albertans and save ratepayers money. Again, we cannot deal with the infrastructure that has already been built other than to pay for it, but moving forward, we can manage costs and keep them down for Albertans.

Mr. Getson: I appreciate that, Minister. Again, like the members opposite, I've been receiving lots of calls from constituents talking about costs going up, whether they're on an AISH program or whether they're on a fixed income, others, seniors. Again, a lot of the hidden costs, I guess, in the transmission, in the energy sector. Also, the carbon tax was hidden in there. My understanding as well was that, again, in my area for the premature phase-out – I might say breaking some very, very strong legislation and agreements in place. Each one of those taxpayers and ratepayers is now paying for that on their power line. That was for the phase-out and breaking those contracts with the power producers that I hope we're going to pay off here sooner than later, but they're still showing up in everyone's power bills, I would imagine, for the next number of years.

Minister, I look forward to seeing more dialogue and debate in the House. I'm going to pay close attention to it. I really appreciate your efforts for your ministry of working through that. Again, the ongoing consultation with those industries in our area, across the province is of paramount importance and, again, that concept of radical collaboration, of working with other jurisdictions for that trade balance. We want to make sure that we are open for business indeed and well aware of looking to work as a northwest Canada that will be stronger together working on that and doing some of those. I appreciate what you're doing, and I appreciate everyone's time in the House for going back and forth on this bill.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Are there any members? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has risen.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the recognition for my opportunity to speak to this bill. I am happy to be standing in the House talking about a bill which I have some interest in and I have some hope to be able to support as we go forward. I certainly agree with the overall idea that we need to modernize our electrical grid system. We certainly know from the changes that are happening around the world that the use of electricity rather than gas power for automobiles, for example, is absolutely on the rise. In fact, a report came out today that indicated that we have a new S-curve with regard to electrical vehicle purchase that is, in fact, quite substantive and that we are moving ahead of predictions in terms of how many electrical vehicles are coming onto the grid. I think that, you know, having a solid grid with all of the appropriate infrastructure in place is the right thing to do, and I commend the minister for being a part of that as we move forward.

I certainly have a larger term vision myself that we will have many, many opportunities to produce energy that will feed into the grid even as far down as microproducers, people having solar panels on their home that eventually will feed back in. I understand that's not the point of this bill, and I also appreciate that it isn't the right place to put a microproducer exchange system in place. I understand this is for the larger producers, and I support that.

I do love the idea of people being able to help us move along in terms of storage particularly. I've had a number of very interesting

conversations with people involved in producing and generating electricity about how much energy is being put into developing an appropriate kind of storage in our system right now. Unfortunately, in some ways it is the primary barrier to moving forward in terms of much of our global attempt to reduce carbon in the atmosphere. If we had an extremely good and cost-effective storage mechanism, the other things we wish to do would be a lot easier to do. In fact, you know, as part of that larger vision with not only homes producing energy that goes into the grid, it would also be very interesting to see homes become places of electrical storage so that we have a widely distributed system, very much as we've developed something like the Internet, for example, where all of this production and energy use is not in any one place.

The benefit of it is the fact that it is so widely distributed that it's hard to fail. If one section fails for whatever reason, a particular plant burns to the ground, let's say – God forbid – there would be such a widely distributed network of producers and storage facilities that we would be able to adjust accordingly under those terrible kinds of circumstances. I'm certainly not hoping that that happens, but I'm afraid that with our climate change we are seeing some horrible things. I know, for example, in Abbotsford during these recent, terrible storms that they had, they literally got to the place where they were counting on one facility to keep the system going in that town. We don't want to be in that place, so I love the idea of spreading out the production distribution systems such that we have a multitude of sources.

Having said all that, I guess I do have some questions and concerns. Certainly, part of it is transparency pieces. That always makes you worry because we don't have the details that will come out in terms of the regulation. You know, I appreciate the minister may not be able to answer this, having already heard the minister suggest that there will be consultations and things moving forward about some of the regulations. So we're not exactly clear about things like the electrical distribution system plans that companies will be putting together and what the criteria will be in there. We're not completely sure about the nature of the definition of wires and nonwires and how the decision will be made to price the differences between the two or to give a preference to one option or the other. Is there sort of an inset idea that somehow one or the other is the cheaper option and is the option that the AUC will in fact be picking?

All of that is still to be decided, and I think it's something that we need to spend a little bit of time in the future making sure that we get right because, of course, again, as so many things, that is what will make a difference for Albertans. I do appreciate the fact that ultimately having more producers using energy sometimes, as has previously been mentioned by the member across, are even now burning off energy that could actually be used in the system. To have that all in the system is a really positive thing. Hopefully, eventually we'll see the net outcome for citizens and with all of these people putting in, we end up having some competition and lowering the prices.

All of that I can support, but I have my concerns. My concerns were a little bit highlighted by the minister's reference to arbitrage. [interjection] Oh, I'm sorry. I'll let the minister speak, and I'll come back to that.

Mr. Nally: I thank the hon. member for allowing the intervention. I heard a couple of questions, so I just wanted to quickly jump in and address them. One of the questions was the criteria, and the answer is that one of the criteria is that, you know, we don't want to overbuild the system. Unfortunately, we have seen a well-built system in the past to the detriment of the ratepayer. We want to make sure that we don't have that problem with the distributed

generation. I'll give you the most extreme example, electric vehicles, something that people are very excited about. Well, the reality is that we could allow two EVs per neighbourhood right now. More than that would be a problem for our transmission system. So we don't need too many EV charging systems in one neighbourhood; we want to see it spread out. The whole purpose is to make sure that we have a well-built system, not overbuilt. That's how we want to manage it.

In terms of price, price will be determined by the market. The market will determine whether we go with wires or nonwires, whatever the better cost is. The AESO, of course, will manage it. One of their criteria is that they don't gold-plate the system, so they will go with the cheaper, more efficient model.

Thank you.

3:40

Mr. Feehan: Thank you. I appreciate the response. I am certainly aware that that decision regarding pricing will be done by the AUC and AESO. I guess I want to be able to see in a transparent way the decisions that are made and to have those things reported in some public manner so that not only myself but Albertans can see what decisions have been made and what prices are being used for making these kinds of decisions and, you know, what assumptions are going into definitions of cheaper price and so on. Thank you. I appreciate that. I'm just looking forward to the answers ultimately as they come forward.

The question of arbitrage does arise. I do have some concerns with that. As we open up the system, there is this question about when electricity is bought and sold into the system. I know that there have been a number of attempts to create situations where people, without actually contributing overall to the greater amount of electricity available on our grid, have been trying to use the timing of buying and selling into the grid as a way of making benefits. I know that there was at least one proposal, for example, which I don't think would fit any of this criteria but, you know, throw it out there to talk about why I'm concerned, to simply use electricity in the cheaper times of the day to pump water uphill and then to let that water run downhill and produce energy at the more expensive times of the day and then make money, having produced no net energy. In fact, there'll be certainly a certain amount of loss of energy to the system overall, but someone will be making a profit because they are buying low and selling high, as they wish to do.

I guess I worry a little bit about this. I worry that companies will actually take advantage of those kinds of possibilities, to sell into the system at a time when it is most expensive for us to buy it from them. If there's some obligation on the part of the system to buy, can that be forced at a time that isn't the cheapest because of the timing of putting back into the system, not the mechanism of distribution but the timing of it? We know that that's a big issue. [interjection] The minister perhaps would like to address that.

Mr. Nally: Thank you for allowing the intervention. Yeah, I'll deal with that. I appreciate that. I've said all along that the path forward for lowering the cost of electricity is increased choice and more competition. It is that very opportunity, that the hon. member mentioned, of buying when electricity is cheap at night and selling back during the day when the cost is higher that will increase the amount of competition. It might be higher, but it will actually be an opportunity to bring it down during the more expensive periods. It is that profit model that will drive the efficiency that we're seeking. Our commitment is: increased choice, more competition. That arbitrage will provide that opportunity to do that.

There is a jurisdiction right now that has done that. They have purchased our electricity at night and sold it back to us during the

day, so we're essentially using them as storage. I'd like to see Alberta companies do it, to make money at it and to increase competition and choice and lower price that way.

Thank you for the opportunity.

Mr. Feehan: I appreciate the minister's answer. I'm still very concerned because I think that if we open the door too wide, then we end up in a system that does not in fact produce more energy but just has certain people make greater profit off it. We know that there have been situations even where some of our major producers in this province have purposely shut down plants – maybe I should word this a bit more carefully – have been accused of purposely shutting down plants at a time in order to decrease the amount of energy in the system and purposely raising the price up . . . [interjection] Sorry. I just have to finish a few things, but I'll try to look at you in a minute.

. . . so that they could then jump in. If we have a number of companies that are all now contributing to the system, they begin to have an effect on how much supply is available, so it isn't simply a matter of there'll be more competition when the price is high and therefore, you know, the price will come down. They're actually having control over whether or not there is supply or demand. That's a piece that I worry about. I'm just putting it out there so that you understand the concern that I have.

I'll recognize the intervention.

Mr. Getson: I appreciate that, Member. From my former life I can tell you full well that the largest consumer is industry. Typically what we would do in those types of cases as industry, because we want to bring our costs down – we're not net producers to the thing. It's not an Enron equation, so you have to separate that. What I would do is that I would take that cheap power at those times. I would then push it upstream, and then I would have that part of my run-of-the-river-type operations. What you see is that when you're operating a pipeline, the biggest cost is electricity. When you're running ag and forestry and you're doing irrigation, like the irrigation districts do, that's their largest cost, the power consumption to run all the pumps. That's where this gives that opportunity for that energy storage. Ninety per cent of everything you're talking about is literally industry using it at that time so that they don't have the peak costs that you're talking about. That's what they do for self-sustainability.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you. I appreciate the comments.

I certainly am hearing from the government side the hopeful, kind of rosy side of it all, and I appreciate that that's actually true. I'm not disputing what's been happening. My concern is those situations where people are kind of taking advantage of the system. Part of what I'll need to see is the regulations and how the series of tariffs, for example, which are not articulated in this particular bill, will be set up. You know, companies right now can build a plant to provide their own energy and then sell it into the system. Maybe I'm mistaken, but I don't see in the bill anything that says that there's some kind of assumption that you actually are building this in order to use it yourself and then just selling off excess. What happens when it turns out that the amount you're putting into the system is actually 99 per cent of what your need is, and therefore your excess is 99 per cent of what you're producing? Is there some limitation on that?

Can a company start with, "Yes, we're building this to run this plant," and then eventually shut down the plant but keep the energy generation and then keep putting it in and say: well, it's all excess now. It could even get to the point of 100 per cent excess into the system. What's happening then is that they're not actually exporting

their excess. They're actually becoming a producer. It has a different effect on the market when you do that. I guess these are the kinds of things I'm saying that I'm going to be looking forward to.

I certainly want the grid to be increased, as the minister said. Right now I don't think our grid is built in such a way that we can afford to have electrical vehicles in every single home, and I understand that we need to start that process of moving to the inevitability that we might have to have a grid that allows that kind of thing to happen. I'm supportive of the move forward. I just want us to follow the money. You know, it doesn't do us any good to create a bunch of circumstances for people to make a lot of extra money if they're not actually contributing to the net benefit to Albertans by creating this grid that is widely available and, as much as possible, as cheap as possible. Those are the kinds of questions that I'm going to have. Are we setting up circumstances where people will be able to be rent takers and take profit off without actually contributing to the system in a way that's beneficial to everybody?

I really, truly do not think of electricity as an extra. It is a need, and therefore government has a different role than, you know, whether or not you go on a cruise in the wintertime or even if you see a movie. Those are extras. Whether or not you turn on the lights and heat your accommodations are needs, and therefore we have a slightly different role when it comes to these kinds of systems. I'm not wanting to open up the door for people simply to elevate costs because there's a way that they can take profit out of the system. That's the thing I'm concerned about.

I'm also concerned about companies that may subvert other choices that the government is making. You know, for example, on albertasfuture.ca we've started to develop a plan to move to a net zero grid by 2035. What happens if one of these companies decides that they want to use a carbon-intensive process in order to be able to generate electricity and then sell it into the grid, really subverting the fact that we are moving our grid toward net zero? Then these companies may, in fact, actually move us away from net zero.

3:50

Just to throw it out there, what would happen if a company found that they had coal on their property and it was beneficial for them to use coal to generate electricity and then sell it into the system? Even though the province has moved away from using coal on a large scale, an individual company may choose to go in that direction unless there's some regulation that prevents them. I guess I just worry about the subversion of the larger intent of moving our grid forward in a way that is net zero ultimately and that helps us all move to a lower carbon-intense situation in the province.

Much of that will be decided in terms of the regulations and how tariffs are set and rules about how much electricity can come in and when it can come in and who gets to decide whether or not it's bought or sold at any particular time. I understand that the government takes largely a totally open, free-market-system approach to these kinds of things. It's one I generally am somewhat suspicious of. I don't think that it has had the net beneficial effect that some people indicate that it has had. I certainly understand its role, but I actually would really like us to take some time to understand, you know, electrical production as a utility that is a fundamental right of access for all citizens in this province and therefore should not just simply be subject to the whims of the market. I think that the example of the rising price increases that we've seen is an example of that.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The next member who has caught my eye is the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain.

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and it's a pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 86, the Electricity Statutes Amendment Act, 2021. First of all, I just want to thank the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity for bringing forth this important legislation. This is the first bill I've spoken on since being recently appointed as the parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Energy, and although I'm not officially sworn in until tomorrow afternoon, I'm ready to go full throttle into this role, obviously, to assist the Minister of Energy with the exciting developments happening all throughout our province.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is at the beginning of an energy rejuvenation, and this legislation is exciting because Alberta is in a great position to harness this opportunity due to the province's strong energy foundation. Technology is rapidly changing and evolving every single day. Recent technological innovations and developments, which are bringing new jobs to Alberta, are also diversifying our economy. However, it also poses problems to our existing electrical grid. Improvements have been made to modernize Alberta's electricity system, but more must be done. Bill 86, the Electricity Statutes Amendment Act, will help further modernize Alberta's electricity system through three key legislative changes that will impact energy storage, the distribution policy, and the enabling of self-supply with export.

This legislation was developed with input from a wide variety of stakeholders over the last 18 months, including the Utilities Consumers Advocate, all utilities stakeholders such as FortisAlberta, EPCOR, and others, the Alberta Utilities Commission, the Alberta Electric System Operator, the Alberta Federation of Rural Electrification Associations, many REAs, energy market investors, and clean energy developers such as the Canadian Renewable Energy Association and the Alberta Energy Efficiency Alliance.

Mr. Speaker, there are many parts in this legislation that obviously excite me, but I want to focus a little bit specifically on the changes made to electricity energy storage. The Alberta Electric System Operator road map defines energy storage as "any technology or process that is capable of using electricity as an input, storing the energy for a period of time and then discharging electricity as an output." Bill 86 will make amendments to enable the integration of energy storage to Alberta's interconnected electric system as a technology that can participate both in the competitive electricity market and the transmission and distribution systems.

Now, if passed, Bill 86 will make amendments to the Hydro and Electric Energy Act and the Electric Utilities Act, which will accomplish three objectives. First of all, it will establish a formal definition for energy storage in Alberta's legislative framework for the electricity sector. Second, it will allow the distribution and transmission utilities to own and/or operate energy storage assets under specific conditions while also limiting these assets to providing services within the regulated distribution or transmission segments of the electricity system. Lastly, it will allow competitive models to be employed in most instances in procuring distribution and transmission services from market participants.

These are very important changes because of the significant developments of new large-scale renewable energy projects that have occurred in the last recent years. These renewable energy projects are great for our economy and resulted in a significant amount of interest for new energy storage projects. Now, energy storage is a constantly evolving technology that can have different attributes based upon how it is applied and its size. Energy storage projects will likely help manage future costs in our electricity system and are a cost-effective option for enhancing grid stability, reliability, and are a potential alternative to our traditional wires for transmission and/or distribution. Mr. Speaker, as Alberta continues to unleash its renewable energy potential, energy storage can help

renewable energy generators dispatch their generation in hours when electricity is needed most. Now, this is a benefit to our electricity system and results in a more efficient use of our generation assets to benefit customers.

Bill 86, the Electricity Statutes Amendment Act, will also enable a balance between consumer choice and grid security by enabling self-supply with export while having mechanisms in place to ensure that the overall grid is safe, reliable, and cost effective for all Albertans. This will be achieved by amending the Electric Utilities Act to include a definition of self-supply with export and by including three exemptions to broadly enable market participants to choose self-supply and export. Now, this is great news as the legislation would allow any developer to apply to the Alberta Utilities Commission to connect their generating unit to generate electricity for their own use and also to export electricity to the grid.

Bill 86 will also allow for the development of a planning framework to oversee and co-ordinate the modernization of Alberta's electric distribution system. A planning framework will also be beneficial because it will enable consistent standards for efficient grid development, promote alignment between distribution and transmission system planning, avoid the overbuilding of infrastructure, and ensure long-term planning, which will benefit customers right across Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I'm obviously pretty excited for the future of Alberta's economy. Alberta has such a high potential for renewable energy developments as well as continued investment in various new energy-related projects and infrastructure. Obviously, I urge everyone to vote for Bill 86.

I guess, just before I wrap up here, I want to again – as many of the members in the House have talked about their prior experience working with energy and electricity projects around the province, I know, for myself, I have spent extensive time working in various power generation sites all over the province. I was at the G3 expansion in 2004 as a young tradesman – I spent many shutdowns out there; I would say that I know every catwalk and tank and vessel on the Genesee site – as well as I spent years working on the K3 expansion in 2007 as we continued to expand the electricity capacity of the entire province.

Anyways, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to this bill. Obviously, I urge everyone in this House to vote for Bill 86.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Calgary-East has risen.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to express my support for this significant legislation that will modernize our electricity laws, Bill 86, the Electricity Statutes Amendment Act, 2021. I would like to thank the Minister of Energy and Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity for taking this important initiative to ensure our system is able to meet the fast-emerging technological innovations and promote investor confidence through sustained focus on regulatory clarity and efficiency.

Alberta's energy-only market continues to attract new investment and competition. It is a good thing that we have maintained this type of market through Bill 18 in 2019 after consulting with a cross-section of stakeholders. During the consultation process stakeholders voiced strong support for the energy-only market, saying that it offers structural and administrative simplicity and has a proven track record for providing both affordable electricity and a reliable supply of electricity. Investors expressed confidence and a willingness to invest in an energy-only market, saying that it is established and understood, which offers greater certainty regarding its future performance.

4:00

Technological and industrial developments continue to evolve rapidly, producing new challenges and opportunities. We are seeing a transition from centralized to decentralized generation systems in baseload to intermittent electricity generation. Alberta's electricity system, like many globally, is seeing the way that electricity producers and consumers interact with and use the electricity grid evolve as innovative technologies and changing consumer behaviours are increasingly asking a one-way-flow power system to operate in a bidirectional, or two-way, manner. This can also be seen from the significant rise in distributed energy resources, including distributed generation like solar panels, small natural gas fuel generators, energy storage, electric vehicles, and controllable loads.

With these emerging advancements occurring, Bill 86 will reinforce our energy-only market and maintain market competitiveness. It will ensure consumers have safe and reliable, affordable electricity while promoting investor confidence through regulatory efficiency, policy clarity, and removal of needless barriers. More and more consumers have expressed interest in a self-supply with export system. The Alberta Utilities Commission expressed that there are limited circumstances where the owner of a generating unit is allowed to consume electricity produced from the generating unit on their own property while also exporting the electricity produced by their generating unit for exchange through the Power Pool. With no exemptions applied... [interjection] Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Nally: Thank you to the hon. member for the intervention. I enjoyed listening to him speak. I wanted to ask him a question, Mr. Speaker, through you to him, because he is a business owner. He was talking about self-supply, but just prior to that, he was talking about rooftop solar. Right now you can do rooftop solar but only up to five megawatts. With this legislation, you'd be able to do rooftop solar above five megawatts. My question to the hon. member is: what impact would this have on him as a business owner, and is this something that he would welcome, the lower costs through rooftop solar? I would just love to hear his experience from his business experience and what this would mean to him.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Minister, for the important question here. Solar power is very important as we can use solar power and sell this to the grid as well. I will have more on solar power as I continue with my expression. Thank you.

The AUC recognizes that the current legislation was enacted prior to the recent increase in distributed generation and the availability of economic small-scale generating units. Having said that, Mr. Speaker, in late 2019 consultations on the issue of power plant self-supply and export were made. The majority of the 33 submissions received were in favour of the option of having unlimited self-supply and export, which requires a change to the statutory scheme and may require changes to existing transmission and distribution tariff structures. A second round of consultation was made in 2020, which was focused on the market and tariff implications of unlimited self-supply and export. The AUC published a discussion paper which included a summary of the submissions received from the said consultation.

With thoughtful consideration of all the relevant matters, including the result of the consultations, and ensuring ongoing fairness relative to the transmission costs of uneconomic bypass, this bill will enable unlimited self-supply with export and retain existing exemptions. It will clarify tariff treatment of self-supply with export projects in the spirit of fairness and ensure that these projects will align within an efficient, fair, and competitive electricity market.

Currently, Mr. Speaker, Alberta's system is based on companies that generate electricity as their co-businesses plus limited exceptions such as industrial system designation and small-scale generation. Commercial and industrial businesses who would like to generate electricity and export to the grid are currently not permitted to do so. By enabling self-supply and export, everyone who wants to generate their own electricity will be able to do so and export the excess electricity to the grid and will pay their fair share of overall system cost from which they benefit, including transmission.

Increased self-supply with export is not expected to increase electricity cost for Albertans. Rather, the additional generation would help stabilize electric energy prices and encourage electricity market competition, and with greater competition, consumers would expect more options and different offers. Also, this system is designed to ensure that those participating pay their fair share of system costs, which, in turn, would then keep the system costs stable for consumers. In addition, this bill, Mr. Speaker, will explicitly provide the definition of "energy storage resources," which is lacking in the current legislative framework and inadvertently limits its application. It's aimed to provide clarity to regulators and ensure certainty to investors. It will also identify parameters of users, ownership, and cost recovery.

Over the past several years there has been an increased interest in energy storage projects in Alberta, particularly in the last couple of years. The significant development of new large-scale renewable projects has resulted in substantial interest in new energy storage projects. Canada's largest solar energy project is under way in Vulcan county, which attracts big investors like Amazon apart from their announced investment of a solar energy project in Newell county, east of Calgary, which will produce over 195,000 megawatt hours of renewable energy. That is enough to power more than 18,000 Alberta homes for a year.

This would promote the diversification of our economy. We have to modernize our legislation and system for us to address growing development. Energy storage is an evolving technology with potential benefits for all aspects of Alberta's electric energy system. Energy storage has many different attributes. Depending on the application, they look like generation, load, transmission, or distribution. Energy storage technology is also scalable, resulting in deployment at the smaller residential scale all the way to larger commercial projects.

4:10

Another positive impact that this bill introduces, Mr. Speaker, is the establishment of a long-term planning framework to modernize Alberta's distribution system. Grid modernization is needed to support the evolving system, and should there be no conducting of long-term planning now as an unexpected cost may result in the future. Proper consideration must be made respecting the needs of rural electrification associations or disconnected municipalities. Suitable development of road maps and considerations for storage, electric vehicle charging, energy efficiency, and distributed generation must also be made with minimal technical standards.

To ensure accomplishment of these needed modifications of distribution policies, this bill will authorize the minister to guide the planning framework through regulations. Alberta's current policy framework does not require distribution companies to proactively plan for adoption of distributed energy resources and does not require distribution facility owners to consider the system benefit which these resources could provide. However, proactive planning of grid modernization will provide for better cost management and improve customer outcomes. Legislative amendments are required to ensure the distribution system can enable the development of distributed energy resources in an orderly and efficient manner. It

is expected that the transparent and co-ordinated long-term planning framework will support an orderly and most efficient transition to a modernized grid that will integrate more distributed energy resources.

With that in mind, Mr. Speaker, the government seeks to improve all the lives of Albertans. Alberta's recovery plan is setting unprecedented paths to a new, innovative, and diversified energy future. Recognizing the development of new sustainable forms of energy will become more of a driver of investment moving forward. It is the provincial government's ongoing aggressive response to the impacts of the pandemic and distribution in the global energy markets. As we strive to lead the country in economic growth, we are seeing new businesses and more investors coming towards our province as we promote diversification. That is why the changes that this bill carries are very significant to ensuring that all consumers and investors in every corner of Alberta have a sustainable electricity and utility system while also maintaining affordability and a reliable supply of electricity.

Let me again express my appreciation to the Minister of Energy and the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity for introducing this initiative. I encourage all members to support the bill, which modernizes Alberta's electricity system and promotes investor confidence.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to join debate?

Seeing none, I am prepared to offer the hon. associate minister the opportunity to close debate should he so choose.

Mr. Nally: No. I'll waive that.

[Motion carried; Bill 86 read a second time]

Bill 79 Trails Act

[Adjourned debate November 15: Ms Sweet]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has risen.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to take a moment to speak to Bill 79, the Trails Act. You know, we find ourselves in a funny position with this act in that typically when legislation that purports to be about environmental protection comes into the House, we have environmental scientists and others who care for our world happy and celebrating the fact that there are pieces of legislation coming forward, and in this particular case they are not. That should give us some pause for concern, that the experts in the area are a bit loath to celebrate this act.

I started to begin to ask: why? You know, what is it? If we are going to have an act that governs the creation of trails in this province, which I actually think we should have – we have many of them in this province. I've been a long-time backcountry hiker and have taken advantage of many dozens of trails throughout the province as far south as the Whaleback and north up into the Rockies and so on, and I certainly think that we should have a system that actually provides for sustainable trail management and therefore was happy to see a bill coming forward.

I find myself in this position where there's not a sense that there is a consistent philosophical reason for this Trails Act being brought forward that would actually suggest to us that the intent is the preservation and protection of the environment and the appropriate designation of trails for the benefit of the protection of the environment. You know, that's of some concern here. What the bill

apparently seems to do is to try to take the decision and send it off over to the minister's office and to have the minister make decisions without a variety of required decision-making points.

You know, we've recently had bills in the House that talked about infrastructure, for example, and what criteria would be used for the decision of taking on a contract by the province. I had an opportunity to stand up and talk both about the things that I liked in that list of criteria and the things I thought were absent from that list of criteria, and I think that's an appropriate thing for us to be discussing in this House. What I'm finding here in this bill, however, is that we have the decision-making simply being shuffled into the minister's office without any transparency about what thought process will go into the creation of new trails and, clearly, not any consideration whatsoever about the possibility of closing trails.

I mean, one of the things that the scientists have been asking: what happens if you have an area that has some kind of a designation, a sensitive habitat? Can they through this act apply for a trail to be closed in order to protect that habitat, to protect, you know, sensitive or vulnerable species that are in that habitat? Well, I don't see that in the bill. I don't see that the environment comes first here. What I see is the decision-making for a minister to create more and more trails in our landscape and something that – even while I am and have been in my life quite an extensive user of many trails, I believe that there should be some regulations and limitations put on it. I don't see the criteria for that here in this bill.

If we're going to depend completely on the minister, then we have to really question whether or not the minister has, you know, the desire to take care of the environment. It's a sad thing that we have a situation where it is not a common belief that that's been true, that the minister in this particular case, who is the minister of the environment, is actually putting the environment before other concerns. I mean, this is the minister that tried to sell off or close down somewhere around 170 parks and move them out of the protection of his department.

4:20

We've seen him introduce fees for hiking but not introduce fees for ATVs, when certainly any objective criteria will tell you that hiking has been much less damaging on our natural environment than ATVs. While I believe there is a place for ATVs in the environment, it's because of the nature of the machine that we need to have more regulation on them. Walking across a field is very unlikely to cause permanent damage, but driving a heavy vehicle with deep, rutted tracks across a field can be immediately damaging even without any kind of misbehaviour on the part of the ATV operator. Of course, we always have people, whether they're hikers or ATV enthusiasts or backcountry skiers or whatever, who do things that are very inappropriate on the trails. I certainly would have liked to have seen more action taken on those people who are engaged in behaviours which are really antagonistic to the environment.

I'm concerned that this minister has demonstrated in other ways that he's not willing to protect the environment. He's willing to open the eastern slopes to coal mines in spite of the fact that the vast majority of people in this province have indicated they do not wish this to happen. Of course, the support for closing down coal mining on the eastern slopes is really across the populace, representing farmers and ranchers and hikers and members of small-town communities as well as people who dedicate themselves to helping us to become an environmentally responsible nation. It's very disconcerting that we see a minister who has done all of these kinds of things being given suddenly a bunch of power to create more trails and very little done in terms of giving a list of criteria or

priorities or even philosophical direction to the way in which these decisions will be made.

I was very disappointed, I guess, I must say, to see that the very first meeting between our minister of the environment and the newly appointed national environmental minister, our minister chose to wear a T-shirt. That clearly was just provocative. It didn't add to the conversation. It didn't invite two important ministers to get together and have a conversation that would help to build a relationship that would lead to the ultimate goal of protecting the environment, which is so essential to all of us. This is just adolescent behaviour that does us no good, that does not encourage people to see Alberta as a place they want to come to vacation, to enjoy the wilderness. Therefore, it makes me very worried that somehow this minister is being given more responsibility or more power over the decision-making in this situation.

I'm also concerned that some of the promises by this minister that we got about what would happen with regard to previous bills did not in fact happen in the way which I think all of us would expect that they were supposed to happen, my primary example being the hiking pass for the Kananaskis park, in which people who formerly were able to hike in the park free of cost were suddenly being asked to pay \$15 or \$100 a year to go hiking in the park. Some part of me says: okay; I'm always willing to contribute to the betterment of our environment and want to do that, but I always worry about things that get in the way and cause a burden for people who cannot afford things as I can. I've been very privileged in my life to always have that extra money to pay for those kinds of things, but I know that many people use the parks because they can't afford holidays in other places and it is a cheap way to take a holiday if you are able to go out into the backcountry.

As a result, you know, I did not like this fee being imposed, but I thought: well, I lost that one. I wish I had won that one. I wish we'd been able to prevent it, but at least all that money collected will go into Kananaskis park and we'll be able to see things better. The minister assured us that all the money did go into Kananaskis park, yet what do I see when I see an evaluation of the amount of money that's been spent in Kananaskis park? Lo and behold, while all the fees did go in, the money that the government had previously put in from nonfees was withdrawn so that the net amount of money being spent in Kananaskis park did not change with the fee. So we're gathering extra money, and then we're using it to substitute money we're taking away. How does that make sense? You know, in the end, ultimately, the fees that are being paid in Kananaskis park are not enhancing the environment.

So here I am, back in this place being told, "Oh, what we're going to do is that we're going to give this minister who's done these things, who's engaged in this adolescent behaviour, who has told us he would do one thing and then turns out that it wasn't what we would expect the outcome to be," then suddenly I'm supposed to sit back and say, "Oh, I trust that the decision-making will be good." I simply don't. You know, even if there were some constraints on the minister, by providing a set of priorities, a list of criteria like the Infrastructure minister provided to us in his bill about how these decisions will be made, if there had been some emphasis about balancing, not just opening up new trails but also closing trails where appropriate in order to protect the environment, limiting access from time to time in certain areas and certain locales where we have endangered species of plants and animals, birds and fish, then I would feel much more comfortable with a bill of this nature.

But I'm not comfortable. I'm left here saying: this looks like trouble. This looks like what we're going to have suddenly is permission granted for all kinds of intrusion into our natural environment without appropriate controls, without appropriate

balance, and without even a philosophical statement of intent here directing us to what it is that we're trying to do with our environment.

I certainly want to encourage people to go out into it because I believe that people who engage the environment have a greater desire to protect it. Since we need to protect the environment in order to live well in this society, I really want more and more people to go out and enjoy the wonderful experience of engaging our trees and rivers and fields and mountains and streams and valleys. Hopefully, from that, they will then become contributors to a mindset that says that we should live more gently on the land, that we should ensure that while we benefit from the great psychological support that we receive from engagement with the Earth, we also don't cause harm, that we leave nothing but our footprints when we go into an environment and come out again.

Here we have a Trails Act that doesn't seem to have that philosophical orientation to it, that doesn't seem to have the belief that the department of environment should be about the environment first and foremost, that when that minister comes to the cabinet table, they will stand up for the environment and sometimes even challenge other ministers and say no when the time is right to say no because their job is the job given to them to protect the environment, and to act on that would be the appropriate thing to do. But we do not have that experience in this province. We do not have the experience that we can faithfully leave this to the minister and feel comfortable.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The next member to join debate is the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

4:30

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an absolute pleasure to have the chance to return to the Legislature today and to add to the debate on Bill 79, the Trails Act. I am a great lover of the outdoors here in Alberta. Indeed, I often plan my vacations in the summer around the opportunity to find great sets of trails. I love backpacking. It is a love that was instilled in me, as I think I've spoken of in this Assembly, at Crowsnest Lake Bible Camp here in southern Alberta, in the beautiful Crowsnest Pass, where I had the opportunity to go on what they called out trips. Those are overnight trips where they take the campers out for one or two or three nights, depending on the age. It was there that I got that first experience of sleeping out in the backwoods under a tarp and hiking across an incredible trail system there through the Crowsnest Pass.

I often plan my vacations here, when I'm staying here, when I'm not flying out of country – and I certainly haven't been for the last couple of years – around those opportunities to hike great trails, particularly around finding peaks to summit. That's one of my personal favourites. Also, of course, I do have my mountain bike. There are some fantastic mountain bike trail systems here in the province of Alberta and many opportunities to go out and just enjoy that peace and quiet in the wilderness. Now, I recognize that not everybody likes to enjoy trails that way.

Just this past summer I was back in the Crowsnest Pass and went to climb Crowsnest Mountain. That area has certainly changed, that section along Atlas road, where we used to take the old school bus from the camp up to hike on various trails or out in different areas. That area has changed. It's been designated now as an off-highway vehicle area. I recognize that is a valid way for people to go out and enjoy the wilderness. It's not my personal taste, but I appreciate those who do. But I certainly did see the impact that that has had as I went up the trail towards Crow and saw, certainly, at a couple of spots where there was a creek crossing that it's had quite an effect

there. It's dug things out quite a bit. There are trail ruts, and it was quite muddy and mucky in those spots. I recognize that is a valid use, but it is one that we have to consider the impacts of.

When we are looking at the Trails Act, ideally what we are looking at is an attempt to balance these different uses, these valid uses of trails throughout the province of Alberta in light of also the attendant environmental impact. Now, for some time I think it was a bit of a Wild West. Certainly, you know, in the days that I was out there and when I was hiking when I was younger, in the late '80s and early '90s, we saw a little more of that. We shared roads and trails with off-highway vehicles. They would often pass us sometimes. We were hiking on some of these trails. But we do need to consider that as trails expand, as this covers more of the province, and as we recognize that there are indeed real environmental sensitivities, this needs to be done responsibly.

Now, certainly, we undertook some of this work when we were in government. I appreciate the work that my colleague the MLA for Lethbridge-West did in her time as the Minister of Environment and Parks towards working out those compromises. I believe one of those compromises was, as I said, designating that area along Atlas road as being the area of off-highway vehicles while other trails were indeed taken off as part of preserving some of the areas in the Castle Mountain recreation area.

The Minister of Environment and Parks, in introducing Bill 79, said that his intent with the bill was, in fact, to do just that. He said that if the bill was passed, it would modernize how Alberta trails are managed while conserving the environment and improving recreational experiences for all Albertans. He said that it would help care for trails, that it would make them safer by ensuring they're managed properly, that they would be designated for specific uses like hiking or biking or off-highway vehicles, and that it would give better enforcement tools to preserve the conservation and environmental stewardship across our public lands. That is the minister's claim.

But in a review that was posted by a University of Calgary professor, law professor Shaun Fluker – it was posted on the ABlawg blog, which delves into analyzing legislation. His view was that it would be easy to support Bill 79 if the proposed... Act [indeed] had any content which suggested it would achieve [any of] these objectives

that the minister laid out. But he points out that, in fact, it does not. There is nothing in this bill, not one thing, that actually sets out specifically anything that the minister said he wanted to accomplish.

As Mr. Fluker notes,

in its current form the legislation will almost certainly fail on every one of these counts, other than facilitating more access to recreational trails by OHV users."

Why does he say this? Well, he says that this bill is basically just framework legislation,

a statute that consists almost entirely of permissive statements which authorize a minister or other member of the executive branch to enact all the substantive legal rules sometime later outside of the legislative process.

There is absolutely nothing in this bill that actually does anything other than say that the minister can do these things later. It is a blank cheque. It is being said that anyone that votes for this bill is essentially saying: we trust the Minister of Environment and Parks that he may perhaps do what he said he would do. But there's nothing in this bill that actually constrains him to do that. There's nothing in this bill that actually lays out what he intends to do.

Now, Mr. Fluker goes on to note that

this sort of lawmaking by the Legislature is far too common in Alberta... The executive branch...

And he's speaking of this UCP government.

... appears to be hopelessly addicted to governing in this manner of delegated lawmaking, and that spells trouble for democratic or political accountability where, as is the case in our system of government, the executive branch largely controls the legislative agenda in the elected assembly.

What the bill does is that it says: well, if the minister wishes, he can designate what trails are subject to the act. No information about what criteria he will use, about what might be involved in that, what he's required to consider, just that the minister will have the power to do that, that the minister will have the power to establish management plans for designated trails. Do we have any information about what will be considered in that, on who will be consulted, on whether there are any rules or constrictions on that? No. Nothing in this bill. The minister may appoint a manager for designated trails. Any definitions of what that will be? Any explanation of who might qualify or what might be involved? No. None. He can delegate management of designated trails by agreement and enact regulations to implement and administer all of the foregoing powers.

Again, the Assembly is being asked to write the Minister of Environment and Parks a blank cheque. We're being asked to simply say that we trust this minister, that he will make good decisions, that we are not going to actually talk about what those decisions will entail, who should be involved in them, what details should be considered; we trust him.

Now, my colleagues, I think, have already begun to lay out a number of reasons why we should not be trusting this particular Minister of Environment and Parks. We have seen quite clearly the kinds of decisions he has chosen to make so far in his role, how he has in fact undermined our parks system. Indeed, one of the first things under this government – and we spoke on it long and at length, and certainly they were very sensitive on the point. We know for a fact that they did try to sell or close over 170 parks in the province of Alberta. Albertans were not impressed. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, as I continue to go out and door-knock both here in Edmonton and in Calgary, I see protect-our-parks signs on Albertans' lawns. They are there because this government, this Minister of Environment and Parks, who we're being asked to sign a blank cheque to decide how we're going to maintain trail systems in the province of Alberta and protect some of our most sensitive areas, because that minister, with the support of the members of his caucus, tried to close or sell 170 parks in the province of Alberta.

Then that minister turned and imposed a tax on nature, the new Kananaskis conservation pass fee. While they were giving away billions of dollars to corporations which then took jobs out of the province of Alberta, invested those dollars elsewhere, and slipped them into shareholders' pockets, they were forcing Albertans to pay more for access to the parks that they own.

Then that Minister of Environment and Parks sat back and indeed made excuses for his colleague the Minister of Energy as they proceeded to open the eastern slopes for coal mining. Indeed, that minister helped facilitate that by rolling back regulations in the middle of the long weekend in May at the end of the first wave of the pandemic. [interjections]

4:40

Now, the members opposite are obviously very sensitive about their record on this because I hear them talking to me now and hear them heckling. Certainly, I know they have heard from thousands of Albertans who have not been impressed with their record of trying to sell or close over 170 parks in the province of Alberta or

add strip mining into the eastern slopes of the Rockies and endanger the water and the coal in those areas.

Indeed, when we are talking about this particular piece of legislation, we need to recognize that that is the record of this minister. [interjection] No. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is the record of this minister and that is the record of this government, and they are asking us again to write a blank cheque to this minister to determine how we protect our sensitive areas in the province of Alberta, to make these incredibly important decisions.

Now, we know that there are some real issues and some real challenges that need to be addressed here. We see that indeed there are areas of the province where we are already surpassing the sustainable threshold for what should be allowed in those particular areas; for example, the Livingstone-Porcupine Hills. There is a legal document, the regional plan for the area, that states no more than .4 kilometres of trail for every square kilometre in the most sensitive zones and .6 kilometres everywhere else. Government estimates – so that would be from the minister’s own department – already put the density in that area between .9 to 5.9 kilometres for every square kilometre, that in an area, Mr. Speaker, again, where it should be .4 in the most sensitive zones, .6 everywhere else, up to 5.9. That is well past the limits. There are other parts of the province like in Bistcho Lake, the region in the north. Only 6 per cent of the caribou habitat there has been undisturbed by linear features. Only 6 per cent. We have an agreement signed with Ottawa to try to bring that up to 65 per cent. We’ve got a lot of ground to make up, Mr. Speaker.

When we know we have real issues that need to be addressed here, I think Albertans deserve a little better than: trust me. Albertans deserve to see this government’s work, and it deserves to be on the floor of the Legislature and debated, not simply left for the minister to make a decision by himself in his office behind closed doors, particularly when we have a government which has the record that this government does in refusing to listen to Albertans, refusing to consult Albertans, taking action, and then when Albertans push back, again refusing to listen to them, indeed using taxpayer resources to create websites and propaganda to try to tell Albertans they are not seeing what they’re seeing.

There are areas where we have real concerns with stream crossings. They can create very real problems, as I’ve said, as I have personally seen, by muddying downstream waters and damaging fish habitat. Now, the minister says that those crossings will be upgraded and cleaned up, but in the Livingstone-Porcupine area, that area alone, Mr. Speaker, 3,000 different stream crossings. Three thousand. But what we are being told in Bill 79 is that the minister is saying that he is going to make these decisions but not putting anything in the legislation that indicates anything about how he’ll make those decisions, who he will consult with, what criteria will be involved, or, indeed, any kinds of limitations, simply that the minister will make those decisions sometime later, out of sight, behind closed doors. He may or may not actually speak to Albertans. He may or may not actually take into account the kinds of expertise of experts that are speaking out and are expressing real concern about this legislation.

Time and again what we have seen, Mr. Speaker, is that this is a government that puts politics before the public good. We have seen that endlessly demonstrated throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, we have seen that with their pursuit of coal mining in the Rockies, and I do not trust this minister to enact this legislation as a blank cheque.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members looking to join? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has risen.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It’s an honour to get up and speak to Bill 79, the Trails Act. Although I am in agreement that having a better management regime is indeed a positive move, unfortunately, this bill doesn’t really do that. In fact, it’s a bill that gives the minister more power to do as he pleases without adding any more environmental protections. It’s sad, really, because here we have an opportunity to actually deal with the challenges of climate change, and we have an environment minister who basically is just turning a blind eye.

I know that the minister has gotten up in this House several times to provide rhetoric, I will say, on the fact that this government has the best approach to climate change of any other jurisdiction across Canada. I believe that is what he likes to say in the House in question period when challenged on his approach to climate change, which really is practically zero. But what else can you expect from an incompetent government that refuses to actually deal with the environmental challenges of the day? It’s sad, really. It really is sad because Albertans expect much more from this government.

It is clear that Albertans can’t trust the UCP and particularly this minister to manage our public lands. I mean, they did try to sell or close over 170 parks. They imposed a fee on nature with the Kananaskis conservation pass. They tried to open up our mountains to coal mining. So of course Albertans are absolutely displeased with the record of this particular government. Although the members on the other side may feel it’s a far stretch, it’s an incompetence. It really is an incompetence.

[Mrs. Frey in the chair]

Albertans have been clear that they do not agree with this approach, and the government needs to listen. One good example of the fact that they should be listening is the fact that Bill 214, the Eastern Slopes Protection Act, was offered by a member on our side, the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. You can’t have a trail through a coal mine, and having a better planning process for trails and ensuring that they are repaired should they be damaged by industry is positive. What is a concern is that this act has nothing to do with balancing the development of trails with environmental protections.

We hope the UCP’s promise of improving trails and enforcement is serious, but, as has been outlined by the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford and again by the Member for Edmonton-City Centre, we just cannot trust this minister to actually do that, which is basically, you know, asking us to just give him a blank cheque on this, saying: oh, yeah, give me all the power to do this, and I promise you that I’ll do something about it. Yet we don’t see any action. We hear a lot of words, Madam Speaker, but we don’t see a lot of action.

It’s not just on this file, Madam Speaker, but on a variety of them when it comes to this particular government. We hope that the UCP’s promise of improving trails and enforcement is serious, but of course we have our doubts. The UCP promised that the Kananaskis pass would improve the area, and so far it hasn’t done anything close to that. Our offices are still receiving complaints, detailed complaints, about crumbling trails and overflowing garbage bins. Again, it’s sad.

4:50

Now, in my hopes to really be able to understand the bill that we have before us, I’m going to try to summarize what it is that I’m understanding of the bill, and then I’m going to go through a few questions, Madam Speaker. From my understanding, this bill is going to give the minister the authority to designate trails on public lands but not in parks and could grandfather existing ones or plan for new ones. It establishes some protections for trails once they are designated, and it allows the minister to work with partners; for

example, municipalities or volunteer associations such as the Alberta Snowmobile Association on managing the trails and to appoint a trail manager.

The bill also is for trail planning, which is separate from regional planning – and if there would ever be a case of regional planning and trail designation, the regional plan would prevail – and would also establish a separate process for trails from regional planning, and then there is no requirement for accessing the environmental impacts of the designated trails.

In terms of what is changed, it's that until now the government could designate public land, a recreation trail under the public land, through an order in council, and this has been done only a handful of times. But it could not manage trails with motorized vehicles. Also, designation makes the trail an asset of the Crown, and if industry or others damage the trail, they would have to repair it. It allows for more monitoring and the government to designate a trail manager, as already stated.

When it comes to fees, due to Bill 64, the Public Lands Amendment Act, 2021, which was passed in the spring, the government could charge fees for a lot of these trails. As was highlighted by the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, although some of us are in a position of privilege because of the job that we may have or the remuneration received for the work that is being done, not all Albertans are in a position where they kind of have that excess liquidity to be able to pay for going into a public place. So I would hope that this government comes up with some kind of options for Albertans, because I happen to know several even organizations that make a point of actually going out, taking youth from the city centre, taking them out to public parks and trails so that they can have the experience of getting out there.

A lot of families count on being able to go on vacations, and adding an additional cost to simply being able to go on a trail on public land, well, that just could make it more difficult for them. I hope that the minister will actually take that into consideration.

When it comes to questions about this particular bill, I would like to know from the minister or any member from that side of the House: what will be the criteria for establishing a trail, and what will be the environmental considerations? What will Indigenous consultation look like? What are the constitutional obligations when the trails are designated?

You know, I have to say that I'm surprised by this government that likes – again, Madam Speaker, all words, no action – to say that they're doing something about reconciliation. When it comes to their project with Indigenous peoples, Indigenous corporations, yeah, that's one aspect. But if that's your answer to every question or factor when it comes to reconciliation, I'm sorry; that is just an incredible lack of understanding of what reconciliation is all about.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The government would be well served to actually work, dig a little deeper when it comes to the issue of reconciliation, and not think that by only providing space within a corporation or providing those opportunities for Indigenous peoples to participate in the economy, that's the only thing that's going to lead to improvement in their lives.

I've had a chance, a number of opportunities to sit with Indigenous people, to speak with especially Indigenous leaders that come from a more traditional side when they talk about conserving, for example, even traditional medicines, conserving their own traditions, their own culture, their own way of being, their understanding of how they live on the land. I would hope that the minister of environment is going to make it a really important

aspect of his work and actually consult with Indigenous people when it comes to the issues related to this particular bill.

The other aspect when it comes to this bill, you know, is that we talked about how the minister will work with organizations to actually come up with trail managers and that it could be done in concert with organizations here in the province of Alberta. I think that, yeah, for the most part that's really great. We should provide those opportunities for organizations to participate in the process. But we still do not have details on: well, how will these managers be chosen? How can we assure ourselves that all of the requirements for managing a particular trail are going to be met? None of that is actually covered within the bill. So it's something that I would point out to the minister that we would need more information on when it comes to the work of this bill that we have before us.

The UCP likes to argue that this will help and care for the trails and that the act enables sustainable trails management. However, the act does not guarantee sustainable trail management but, instead, lets the minister manage the trails that he pleases. [interjection] By all means, my friend. Go ahead.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, hon. member. I just wanted to point out that the hon. member was in government caucus for four years. He knows full well that when a bill is brought forward, the statutes are set out, but the regulations, the policies are also developed after the fact. The argument that he's making right now, Mr. Speaker, really, he knows the process. He knows how this works. I would like him to be able to comment on the fact that that is how all bills work and how this rolls out and that this process is the same. I would like to have him speak to that if he could.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much for the interjection, hon. member, and you're right. There is a process to this. However, through the process of debate we have the minister specifically shed light on some of the issues that the opposition is asking about. As you well know, hon. member, there's a possibility of the opposition being able to bring amendments into the House. There's debate. There's discussion. They're like: how will this look in the future? But too often, Mr. Speaker, through you to the member and all the members of the House, what we see from this government is not enough detail, covering things very lightly, bills. Yeah. I mean, like, the government talks about so many bills.

5:00

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A pleasure to rise and speak about something as important and critical to all Albertans as our trails, and that is something that Bill 79 covers in great detail. I know that every one of us in this Legislature, I would think, without exception has some very fond memory of trips that we may have made to the Rocky Mountains or other areas or wilderness areas in the province, but particularly our Rocky Mountains' wilderness areas and our trail systems that may have allowed us to take a day trip or an extended, lengthy hike such as those undertaken in his younger years by the Member for Edmonton-City Centre. If we took a survey or a roll of all the members in this Chamber, we would find probably a very interesting trail book, that would make a useful tourism guide for others who've not yet had the experience to use to learn more about our trails and how valuable they are and how much they form a part of our culture here in Alberta and how much of the Rocky Mountains is not just the spine of the province, but they form a spine and a foundation for our culture.

I, too, share in that experience, Mr. Speaker, with early family trips in a tent trailer built by my father, with six kids, behind the station wagon going up to Miette hot springs and taking little day trips from there. That was something that was an early memory. Even more recently, of course, in our late teenage years and early 20s good friends of mine had a cabin in Cadomin. That was a period of time when indeed on the trails my buddies then had motorcycles. They were involved in motocross racing, and we went up and stayed in a cabin.

I know that Bill 79 contemplates the minister having significant ability to control such uses, but the use that was made by myself and my buddies of the trails up around Cadomin in the middle '70s, riding motorcycles, certainly, hopefully, would be something that the minister would object to under Bill 79, if indeed that was something he encountered, because I know that that use certainly was much different than the type of use that I would have made later on in my experiences in the mountains, going ice climbing with my brother-in-law outside of Canmore, because the motorcycling that we did certainly did not respect the creek crossings and the waterways, the damage that motorcycles really can do to the backcountry.

When I think of Bill 79, Mr. Speaker, it's these experiences that I've had in the trail system in the Rocky Mountains that I see as something that the minister must be looking at and, considering the different uses that people will make of the Rocky Mountains, what indeed fundamentally underlies his responsibility. That is to ensure that the trail system and the ecological system, the environment, remain intact and that the uses do not destroy it. There is, you know, the hiking use, the backcountry use, the ice climbers, the cross-country skiers. Even horseback riders do not produce the type of damage, potentially, that can be done by off-road vehicles in the backcountry. That's not, certainly, to condemn the off-road vehicle users. I was one myself, and I certainly enjoyed it. I had a great time. I loved it.

But we were not as cognizant then as we are now of how much damage can be done, how important in particular the eastern slopes of the Rockies are to our irrigation system, to our water supply. Of course, as most people will now begin to become aware with climate change, our glaciers are melting. Those glaciers only provide about 20 per cent of our water flow through our rivers which go right across the prairies; 80 per cent of our water supply, Mr. Speaker, is provided by the sponge of the eastern slopes of the Rockies, which retains it and releases it over time so that we have a water flow of clean fresh water, at least so far, going right across the prairies, supplying our irrigation system and our drinking water systems, industrial-commercial uses. That is something that we cannot put under threat, whether it be from coal-mining activities that this government would like to allow to happen in the eastern slopes of the Rockies or whether it's from a mixed use of the eastern slopes of the Rockies by way of allowing various forms of recreation to take place, including motorized or off-highway vehicles.

I'll say that I most recently spent time in the Rockies while being a member of the Alpine Club of Canada, which I still support and am a member of. The Alpine Club of Canada has been around for many, many years, and they actually began, I believe, as early as 1922, when they started to try to attract European climbers to the Banff Springs hotel. What they did just inside B.C., in Yoho national park at about the 9,600 foot mark, was to build a small hut, and it's called the Abbott Pass Hut. It's one of those facilities owned by the Alpine Club of Canada and operated in conjunction with Parks Canada. For a small fee – I think it's \$25 – you can register to go and climb up that Abbott pass trail, make your way to the hut, stay overnight, and then come back down.

I've done that. One of the best days of my life, Mr. Speaker, to actually accomplish that. It was my little Everest because I'm certainly not an accomplished climber, but to get up to close to 10,000 feet – the air is getting pretty thin, and believe me it was an accomplishment I was pretty proud of. My brother-in-law certainly wasn't betting on me. He didn't think I was going to make it. In fact, I got a round of applause as soon as I walked into the cabin.

My point is that we still have a relatively pristine set of trails and a system, that is administered by the Alpine Club of Canada and Parks Canada, that can certainly make us proud, but there are some very, very significant pieces of the eastern slopes which have suffered a lot of damage as result particularly of off-road vehicle use in those parks. I mean, I understand. There's a full community. My stepson is an avid off-roader. He builds his own off-road vehicles, big, big monster trucks, and believe me, if you think a motorcycle does a job on a trail, these monster trucks are devastating. They will get, in his neck of the woods, above the mountains in Kelowna, 2,000 to 3,000 people coming up to this so-called wilderness area and doing mud-bogging races and unofficial competitions which result in real devastation. As much as I appreciate his techniques and talents mechanically, what they do to the landscape is pretty disturbing.

That's the kind of thing that we don't want to see happen in our trail system in Alberta. That's why other speakers as well as myself have big concerns about the extreme amount of authority granted under this Bill 79 to the Minister of Environment and Parks to make decisions through regulation, which really demands a wider oversight and a more limited, structured use of the minister's power and defining exactly what he or she might allow in the future in terms of our use of our trails because, as I mentioned previously, the fundamental requirement is that we actually have a trail system that's intact and whole and pristine for people to use.

5:10

If indeed we really go too far in one direction – and I am definitely speaking about off-road vehicles, Mr. Speaker. You don't scar up the hillside too much with cross-country skis. Hiking on a trail doesn't take a deep compression into the mountainside which is going to cause a drainage issue. You might do some damage with a snowmobile. I've certainly ridden those for a number of years in a row on trails. Once again, motorized off-highway vehicles, whether it be snowmobiles or ATVs of some kind, motorcycles, are very hard on the environment.

Certainly, it's a huge industry, a big employer, and people really enjoy their off-road vehicles, as I did for many years, but there has got to be a recognition, Mr. Speaker, that there have to be limitations placed on their use so that we don't open all the territories up to these off-highway vehicles. There have got to be areas where they're allowed and other areas where they're not permitted. If you get into a situation where the minister is looking at allowing a mixed use for the eastern slopes and our trail systems, you're going to find conflicts that are never-ending. It's a tricky area, and I want to make sure that the objectivity of the minister is not lost given the huge authority that he or she will be able to exercise in the future under the guidelines of Bill 79. In a perfect world we wouldn't be causing damage to our trail system when we recreate there.

This is an issue we've been dealing with for decades. I've mentioned in this House before that when I was a grade 11 student on a Sunday afternoon at CFRN radio, not too far from here, I engaged in a radio debate with the then environment minister, Bill Yurko. The topic of the debate was the development of the eastern slopes of the Rockies. This, of course, was two years before the 1976 coal policy came about. Mr. Yurko then was arguing for the

mixed use of the eastern slopes, suggesting that land reclamation was well on its way – it was just in its infancy at that time – that coal mining was an industry that was clean and could be operated in a way that would maintain the sanctity of our rivers. Recreational use on top of that could be overlapped, and everybody would be happy. Well, in fact, myself and my debating partner had been researching for about three and a half months, and we knew a fair bit then about what the new industry of land reclamation was. In fact, there hadn't been one coal mine successfully reclaimed, land reclamation of a coal mine, anywhere that the minister could point to.

Even then, Mr. Speaker, there was a strong urge from Albertans to realize just how important the eastern slopes of the Rockies are. Even in 1976 the Lougheed PC government decided, hopefully with a little bit of a push from a couple of grade 11 students on their environment minister, to come out with a coal policy which limited coal extraction in the eastern slopes to protect the environment and to protect it for future other uses, which include recreational use and the use by Albertans of a trail system that Bill 79, I think, is intended to protect.

One would see gaping holes in the legislation that would lead one to believe that perhaps there's opportunity for damage to the environment that is being seen as collateral damage by the minister in bringing forward this legislation. It's being seen as an acceptable cost when, in fact, even though you're seeking balance between users, whether they be recreational or industrial or coal mining or where we're seeking balance between the skiers and the horseback riders, you must always have, in fact, the sanctity of the environment in mind uppermost.

With that said, Mr. Speaker, I think I would like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I would like to call the committee to order.

Bill 83 Environmental Protection and Enhancement Amendment Act, 2021

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon and, in this case, to enter into debate on Bill 83, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Amendment Act, an act that is after a very long time starting to move Alberta forward when it comes to extended producer responsibility and setting up EPR here in the province of Alberta. Unfortunately, Alberta is last to the table on this, with all other jurisdictions having implemented extended producer responsibility frameworks. This is certainly something that many, many stakeholders, particularly our municipalities and our cities, have been asking for and looking for.

It's certainly a step in the right direction; however, the government has chosen to introduce the bill at this time without any of the detailed work completed on regulations. Regulations have been up for discussion this afternoon when it comes to a number of different bills. My understanding is that the minister is intending this piece of legislation as a signal to other governments, to the federal

government, to producers, to municipalities about the work that the province is doing on this.

I suppose it's a bit unfortunate that we have before us the bill that doesn't implement EPR, but it starts us down the path, allows for exemptions in future regulations for specific materials, activities, industries, people. It doesn't outline who or what would be excluded, but small businesses in other jurisdictions that already have EPR are often exempted from paying program fees. I guess the one thing we know, with Alberta being last to the table and the regulations currently being developed, is that Alberta has the opportunity to learn from and implement best practices from other jurisdictions, so that is the bright side of the fact that Alberta is late to this issue.

Now, the impact of Alberta being late to this issue and not having an EPR framework, an extended producer responsibility framework, is that cities and towns have been shouldering the financial burden of recycling and disposing of consumer waste, oftentimes mountains of consumer waste. Of course, unfortunately, here in Alberta we send more waste to landfills than other jurisdictions, and we are far above the national average when it comes to recycling. All efforts to improve waste reduction are important and should be supported. Certainly, I know of companies and industries and even cities that are working towards zero waste as well as circular hubs, where recycled items are made into new products, ideally reducing the waste that is sent to our landfills.

With Bill 83 a big part of why municipalities have been asking for this and advocating for this for such a long time is because with an extended producer responsibility framework we can shift the cost of recycling from local governments to the producers, placing the responsibility for even postconsumer, so after somebody has consumed a piece of product, on the producer of the goods. This is the way that other jurisdictions have gone, not just here in Canada but all across.

5:20

Now, this bill has a few things that it doesn't do. Obviously, I've already mentioned that we don't get into a lot of the detail. This bill gives the minister the ability to exempt things. It sets out a bit of a framework. It doesn't seem to speak to agricultural recycling, which I understand is quite an important and large issue. Here in Alberta there's currently an Alberta Ag Plastic: Recycle It! pilot, a three-year pilot, that is under way. I've heard that it is a positive step forward but also that right now under that pilot there are really only three places where ag plastic recycling can take place, making it difficult to access for many in our agriculture industries.

Now, I also understand that this bill will not impact beverage container recycling. I had the real pleasure of being able to tour one of my local beverage container facilities just recently and learn more about that industry, the jobs that it creates, and how proud those who work in the beverage container industry here in Alberta are of Alberta's strong network of facilities. My understanding is that through Bill 83 and through Alberta's EPR-related changes it's not intended to impact the existing beverage container industry that we have in our province.

So agriculture plastics and beverage containers are not included in this, but we are looking at something that is going to help define a policy approach for those postconsumer-stage products. I certainly heard the executive director of the Recycling Council of Alberta, someone who was also, as I understand it, at the announcement with the minister for this. I had the chance to listen to her remarks on CBC Radio, and truly there was some excitement that we are taking that initial step forward with EPR, which is very, very positive. But without the details, without the regulations,

without understanding what is actually going to be implemented, we're in a difficult position in debating this piece of legislation.

From a timeline perspective, I understand spring 2022 is when the government is intending to have these things implemented. The industries who will be funding recycling programs will, with this signal, now start to be able to potentially build in any costs into the consumer pricing model. To be clear, a lot of the products we buy already have these costs built in because, of course, people are not just selling products to Alberta; they're selling to other jurisdictions that have EPR frameworks already built into them. I understand that that has left consumers in Alberta, in some cases, paying recycling fees twice. Off-loading this, shifting the costs away from local governments and away from taxpayers into a framework that other jurisdictions have been using successfully is certainly something we want to work towards.

That being said, though, this is the result of almost two years of signalling progress, yet here we are looking at a piece of legislation that doesn't have the details and doesn't have the regulations that would help us to understand exactly how this will move forward. Certainly, we've seen on this and other bills the UCP overpromising and underdelivering without those regulations coming through. As the labour critic labour-related issues jump to mind first when I think about this: the overpromising and underdelivering when it comes to foreign credential recognition and the Fair Practices office for newcomers. Regulations were supposed to be coming that would ensure that foreign-trained professionals would have their credentials recognized in a timely way. The regulations to implement those timelines and those details: my understanding is that we're still waiting for that. We're getting on to about two years since that was first announced. Again, it was announced with a lot of fanfare because of that history of overpromising and underdelivering.

I do want to emphasize that particularly cities and municipalities have been excitedly advocating for an extended producer responsibility framework, particularly when it comes to paper and packaging regulations, to incentivize producers to reduce paper and packaging waste. We certainly as consumers are often aware when we purchase something that has excessive packaging and excessive waste. I know a number of people will choose what products they purchase with that in mind, trying to reduce the amount of waste in their own individual households as much as possible.

Having a robust EPR, especially when it comes to paper and packaging regulations, shifting that cost from local governments to producers, will give us the opportunity to create more jobs and to support a recycling industry. There are a lot of potential jobs associated with the implementation of Bill 83 if we can get it right and if we can make sure that we've got the information that we need and the support that people are looking for.

I know that AUMA, now AM, has at previous gatherings passed resolutions to support EPR frameworks, has worked as part of the consultations.

I would note that in the document *What We Heard: Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) for Single-use Plastics, Packaging, Paper Products, and Hazardous and Special Products*, that the government put out in conjunction with Bill 83, there was a lot of engagement. A large number of people participated in this consultation, wanting to weigh in. In the minister's message it says, "1784 Albertans, small, medium and large businesses, municipalities and other interested parties" all took part. That *What We Heard* document includes a lot of detail and a lot of information, and it shows a lot of support for an overarching EPR framework to support EPR programs for recyclable materials. That's incredibly positive.

But, again, through this bill and because the government has chosen to introduce it here in the fall and not in the spring with

regulations or perhaps having had the regulations done now, which would have been ideal, we are left with more questions than answers when it comes to understanding what Bill 83 is ultimately going to do and what's going to happen. The *What We Heard* document reflects clear consensus on the need to develop EPR, including for single-use plastics and packaging and paper products, but in Bill 83 you don't see those clear, concrete steps identified. Particularly given that Alberta was last and we did not have anything, because we have such high volumes of waste going to landfills, I certainly want to be able to support anything that moves us forward, but this bill is missing the real nuts and bolts that we would need.

Efforts to reduce, reuse, recycle, recover, efforts to build in circular hubs, efforts that move us towards zero waste are all worthy of our attention, especially in light of what's going on in our environment these days and the knowledge that with good government policy and well-designed frameworks we can make meaningful change. We can make sure that we're providing the guidance that producers need to be able to influence the decisions they make so that they can choose to be more environmentally concerned when they're designing their products and their packaging.

This past summer I had the opportunity to tour in my riding the local IKEA. Actually, I believe it's in my riding. There's a chance it might be in . . .

Mr. Rutherford: It is.

Ms Gray: It is right on the border between Mill Woods and Rutherford but technically in Mill Woods.

The IKEA in south common and the IKEA company are doing an incredible amount of work to reduce waste in all of their products, including setting up consumer recycling and the ability to return your old IKEA furniture so that it can be disposed of or reused in so many ways. They went through so many different examples of how this company is working to reduce the waste, everything from the packaging to, like, what they choose to use and put into their materials. They're redesigning entire product lines to make sure that everything is recyclable materials.

5:30

I just thought it was an excellent opportunity to find out more. As you go through that particular store, you can see green dots that tell you where things have been done to be more environmentally responsible and to reduce waste. That is just one example, and it's an example from within my riding that tells an important story of how we all need to be a part of the solution in reducing waste and working towards a better opportunity to make a real difference.

The environmental concerns are important to me. The costs are important to me. The fact that cities and municipalities have been shouldering a cost burden that is more appropriately put on producers and the fact that this is the standard that other jurisdictions have been operating to, I think, are incredibly important.

We definitely would like to see this bill continue and the EPR frameworks to continue, but it would be really great if we could see some sort of guaranteed date by which time we will see the framework and the action. Right now in talking about Bill 83, I'm talking about future visions and goals, hopes and dreams. It would be great to know when we will see the action and the results. Right now in flipping through Bill 83, that's currently just not available information for me.

I know that jobs will be created. I'm curious about how much the extended producer responsibility framework will be able to save municipalities and cities as we go forward. I certainly think that it's important that we continue to support the current stewardship programs that we have, including bottle depots and others, and

continue to work towards reducing waste, reducing what we're sending to landfills as much as possible.

I've had an opportunity to talk to some stakeholders on this. I'm glad that this piece of legislation is now in Committee of the Whole. This has been my first opportunity to respond to it. I certainly am looking forward to continued debate on Bill 83, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Amendment Act, because I want Alberta to no longer be last to the table, to have one of the strongest extended producer responsibility frameworks, and to be able to have all Albertans know that we are improving our own environmental footprint and waste footprints and that we're moving closer to some of those zero-waste ideals, that will make a real difference not only in our local areas but globally as hopefully other jurisdictions continue to work to tackle these large challenges as well.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to enter in a few of my thoughts at Committee of the Whole on this particular bill.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

To join debate in Committee of the Whole on Bill 83, I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I just want to say that it's my pleasure to rise to speak to Bill 83, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Amendment Act, 2021, of which, really, the primary focus is around recycling. I'm very happy to talk about what we can do to reduce waste. I think this is something that – most Albertans are keenly aware of their impacts. Specifically, when it comes to recycling, I think that for a long time we all felt good if we rinsed out a container and we threw it in that blue bag, and then we assumed that we'd done our part.

But knowing that so many major recycling centres internationally – the only ones we really have had access to are in Asia – have been rejecting our waste for a variety of reasons, including the quality of what we were sending to be recycled, I think, puts more onus on all of us in national, provincial, and local decision-making governments to do more to reduce the amount that we're actually putting into recycling and then also to make sure that we are being thoughtful about how we exercise those programs. The vast majority of what people, you know, threw in those blue bins didn't end up getting recycled. I know it probably made a lot of our consciences feel better when we knew that it was going in a recycling bag, but that didn't mean that it was actually being dealt with in the way that we had hoped it would.

I also want to comment on something that was said earlier by another speaker, an associate minister, around regulations always coming after. I want to say that having been involved in drafting a number of pieces of legislation and having served on a variety of committees, the actual standard practice for many, many pieces of legislation is that regulations are drafted at the same time as a bill because, of course, it would be unwise to think about the implementation in isolation from the objectives that are being set out in the bill.

To my colleague from Edmonton-Ellerslie I want to say that asking to see regulations, asking to see what the intended implementation is is a very fair and reasonable request. Yes, they aren't published or passed until after, but regularly governments work on both pieces in tandem. It makes sense. You wouldn't just think about the what without figuring out the how. I want to be on the record saying that. I hope that the how is part of what is also being considered as we're being asked to consider the what of this bill because, of course, a bill without measures to be able to enforce and actually enact is a PR exercise, not an appropriate use of this

place in terms of legislation or how we would want to implement our intended goals.

As the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods has highlighted, municipalities have been urging the government to act on this for some time now, and there is a What We Heard document that was produced. I always appreciate when that type of engagement is gathered and shared publicly. It appears that the government heard and continues to hear an overwhelming consensus that many, many areas of waste diversion and recycling need to be addressed, including the reduce piece, in a significant way.

But, of course, we're here to talk about recycling in isolation, so one of the questions that I have and I'm sure many others have is: why is it that we're only speaking to the recycling piece when waste reduction is so much broader than that now? I think recycling is sort of that last piece, that last effort once we've already exhausted other efforts around reducing our waste.

I also have to speak to the obvious fact that typically, pre-COVID, we would not have as much waste in this place either, right? We would have a glass cup and a reusable insulated cup, and that was typically how we functioned in this place. I know that with the pressures that everyone was under, particularly at the beginning of COVID, we gravitated towards having fewer people touching things and opted for what we thought was going to be a cleaner method of people consuming beverages in this place, but I wonder if we're really achieving that desired outcome with everything we know now and if there would be an opportunity for us to – you know, change begins at home. Here we are in our place of work. What are some of the changes that we might be able to make to reduce some of our own footprint and our own impacts?

I do want to say that this bill seems like another plan to make a plan, and, you know, while that can be a fun communications exercise, I think that the time to act is here. At a minimum I think we would like to see this bill amended to have some kind of guarantee around a date in which we'll see a framework, an action plan, regulations to ensure that this doesn't just sit on a shelf, the paper that has been used to print it, for quite some time into the future.

One of the other big questions that we have, because, again, this doesn't seem to be legislation that's – it's hard to figure out what simple problem is being attempted to be solved in this legislation. It seems like the government has already got many of these powers, so why is it that the government didn't just implement these exemptions? Why is it that they feel the need to bring forward another bill? Does the minister have an estimate on how much an extended producer responsibility regime can save municipalities? I hope that the actual goal here is to find ways to make life a little bit easier for our partners and the people that we are here to serve. And then what's the minister's targeted recovery rate? Is there going to be a difference between products falling under this framework and others?

5:40

Those are some of the sort of highest level questions that I think we've had an opportunity to reflect on. I also want to highlight the fact that Alberta municipalities have said that they want to be active and to be partners in addressing recycling programs that we have for this province. They want to work to establish a modern recycling framework that sets Albertans on a path to a comprehensive policy that enables better change, and really there is a question about whether or not we're actually going to make things easier for these municipalities or not.

Those are some of the main things I want to state. I know that we're getting close to the end of the time for tonight and that

colleagues would like to also speak to this, so I'll cede the remainder of my time, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members looking to join? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate that. I do acknowledge that I've had a chance to speak to some of my concerns with this bill previously, but I want to do a particular focus in this particular section of our conversation, and that is that much of what is apparently proposed in this legislation as it moves forward is a focus on our recycling of environmental materials back into the system after the fact of its creation, its purchase, its use, and its return to the system.

I certainly am supportive. I've been fairly clear about that. I want to see a lot of that happen, but I also think that an environmental protection and enhancement act should also have a fairly large section on sort of prevention as opposed to end-of-life reclamation. I guess, you know, naturally, I think that, of course, both need to exist and that a really good, comprehensive policy will include that. There's still lots to see.

I mean, I've commented before. I thought this bill was fairly thin, but, hey, first steps in, I'm going to support it, right? I have a few suggestions where I think this bill could go or perhaps a subsequent bill if the government doesn't want to take this back, which I actually encourage them to do. Take it back and just fill it out a bit more. I mean, they certainly must have some sense of where they're going with some of these things and so on.

I know that I have mentioned, you know, a variety of different strategies, product take-back mandates that require manufacturers to take back the products at the end of their life cycle and then matching that up with a recycling rate goal, like what percentage of the product needs to be seen back in the system by the industry and what kind of supports to do that would be available from the government and what kind of sanctions, should the industry fail to do that, would be available as well. I mean, these things are all done typically in European countries, and as such it really is something that we could snap onto fairly quickly because we've seen some successes in other parts of the world, in countries that we typically admire.

We also could create, for example, tradeable recycling credits, that would really encourage the companies that are kind of doing it right and have implemented systems where they're really taking back the product to be able to sell some of the credits that they've gained for being over 75 per cent or whatever your recycling rate goal might be and sell that to some of the other companies that are struggling a bit more. It actually gives them an opportunity to increase their profits for being responsible. I think that's often a very good way to do things. I certainly don't mind using market forces to encourage behaviour which is beneficial to all of us in society.

I'd love to see some of that kind of stuff happen. I certainly hope that we do see, as the bill seems to suggest, that there will be sort of advanced recycling fees instituted on various products and that when those fees are implemented, the money that is gathered at the advanced stage will be put into some kind of account. It's suggesting here in the bill what the account is. Of course, we do have the recycling fund, RF, here in Alberta. They could use that to do it and then, of course, claim back the credit when they actually do recycle the product.

Of course, we have many different programs that already do that kind of thing. We have, you know, the beverage container program that does that. We have the electronics program that does that, the

paint recovery that does that, the tires fee that we have, I think – what is it? – about \$5 per tire right now, used oil. We certainly have experience there. I'd love to see some of that, and I support that a lot.

I also believe there is a role for, you know, government to actually subsidize the development of some of these industries so that they have the chance to build and do the right things and learn, develop the lines of purchase and the lines of sales that are needed in order to be successful in this kind of situation. I would love us to be able to become world renowned for doing this kind of thing so that we could sell that expertise to other places in the world.

We certainly have done that with other products, and Alberta has absolutely demonstrated their ability to take their initiative in terms of creating industry and to sell that around the world, with governments helping to get that started, just like we did with the oil under Lougheed, for example. A significant amount of investment was made by the provincial government in the initial companies like Suncor and so on, and that really kicked things off. I'd love to see that happen here again. Now we're at a place where the oil companies really don't need those kinds of subsidies, and I'd love it if that were also true about recycling companies, that they got that little first boost and then they moved to independence. I certainly would like to see that.

But one of the things that I really want to focus on here in the short bit of time that we have left is legislation that doesn't wait until the product is created and then having to be recycled but actually encourages, supports, even cajoles industry into focusing on product design before so that the likelihood of the product ending up in the garbage or being difficult to recycle is significantly reduced. That's an area that I think is kind of missing from this bill altogether. It's a focus that says that if we don't create the problem in the first place, then we don't have to resolve it, and I certainly would like that to be the focus of our legislation moving forward. This, of course, is also being done in other countries in the world, so we certainly have some models of how to do that, and there are a number of different areas in which that focus is implemented. That would include things like limitations on virgin materials or even taxes so that if you use virgin materials rather than recycled materials, then you've got to pay a little extra. It encourages you to not use virgin materials where recyclable materials are more readily available.

You know, the point of the tax is not to burden an industry but, rather, to encourage an industry to move in a particular direction. You can even create the tax such that 100 per cent of it is recycled back to the industry so that the companies that are overusing virgin materials are paying in and the companies that are underusing virgin materials are benefiting from it and growing. Then we actually have a new industry.

5:50

Part of the problem with recycling at this particular time, of course, is that we don't have anywhere to sell off the products once we take them back. What do you do with them? We actually need to do some work at the government level about creating that kind of industry. We can't wait for it to happen just organically, on its own. We need to get out there. We need to be able to provide some money to scientists and so on and engineers and great businesspeople to be able to create a new industry of recycled products that would look at the products that we find ourselves stuck with now and that would move those products to something useful and beneficial to society.

That has multiple benefits. It not only helps us to, you know, reduce things as they go into the system but gives us a place to send them when they go out. It increases our university and research, and

therefore it benefits the universities. It helps entrepreneurs who would like to engage in a new kind of activity to find new markets and to develop processes that will help them to be successful in those markets. All of those things would really be welcome. I think that some kind of a process that works on, sort of, source reduction first, before we got into recycling, would actually be really beneficial and would certainly get the support of this side of the House, I would imagine, that we use less raw materials, that we use less containers when we can avoid them, that we use containers that are not problematic in terms of their deconstruction afterwards.

Often the problem in recycling is that you have containers that have multiple material parts to them, so you have a piece of cardboard but you have a piece of plastic and maybe even a piece of steel all in the same product. Somebody has to take all those things apart. If we could invent processes so that that was not all required, that the product could all be made from cardboard rather than multiple different – it dramatically decreases the cost of reducing that product into usable parts after it has served its life in the community.

I think there's a role of government to try to encourage that kind of product design change, to facilitate businesses that are exploring that process, to actually contribute to the science and to the engineering that make that possible and then, of course, provide a market in which all of that makes sense and benefits everyone involved. So, you know, I certainly would like that: reducing at the source; use better materials, materials that are less damaging either to originally arrive at in the environment than perhaps other things that might potentially be used; use fewer of the raw materials, more of the recycled materials; and design the product so it is easily deconstructed at the time of its recycling.

All of these things are part of the product design changes that could be possible and things I would certainly like to see in a bill of this nature. I would support the government either withdrawing the bill in order to include those kind of those things or bringing another bill forward in the last few months they have as government in this province.

So, you know, I guess I'm at the place now where I am saying: good on you for starting this. Come on, let's dig into this a little deeper. Let's try to accomplish a little bit more before we move on any further. Let's not always do the minimal of anything that we're engaged in. Let's see if we can actually get to a place where, when something arrives in your home, its destiny is known and the process of having it arrive at that ultimate destiny is well established and supported by all levels of government, right from the municipalities who are responsible for the collection of that waste through the provincial government, that then could have responsibility for helping to support and create industry that would provide a profit to the people who are collecting such as municipalities. It would be great if a municipality could actually make some money off garbage instead of losing money on garbage. Wouldn't that be a wonderful change in our society? I think that's the kind of thing we need to think about.

Right now in the city of Edmonton – I happened to look for the numbers when I was doing my research for this particular bill discussion – we actually divert less than 50 per cent of our waste that's headed to the landfills. Then even once we've diverted 50 per cent of our waste into recycling facilities and so on, we end up resending about 25 per cent of the stuff that originally went to recycling back into landfills. So we've not been very successful.

You know, once we were lauded in the city of Edmonton as being one of the best places for recycling and environmental protection with regard to our blue bin program and so on and our recycling and our mass composting and mulching programs, but we just really haven't kept ahead of the curve. Many, many jurisdictions have gone way ahead of us, have been much more successful in understanding that we need to continue this process, that we've only just begun what will inevitably be the way of the future. If we want to be successful in this province, we've got to stop looking backwards at what has been successful for us in the past and start to embrace those industries that are going to be highly valued in the future. They're going to be the source of much of our employment and our income in the future.

I know we can't always guess that ahead of time. You know, any business would certainly explore those possibilities and begin to set themselves up to be ready to take advantage of that when it happens. I think we should do the same thing as a government. We should set ourselves up to be most willing and able to step into the future as it unveils itself to us and provides to us an opportunity to create jobs and success in this province.

I guess my final comment, as I see we're running out of time, is that, you know, I'd like to support this bill. I encourage the government to do more to create an opportunity for me to come back and support the next level and the next level and the next level of engagement in terms of environmental protection and recycling.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you very much.

Are there any other members? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung has risen.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I realize I don't have much time, but I did want to get on the record this evening brief comments regarding extended producer responsibility, something that this bill doesn't contemplate in as much detail or amount as it should, in my view. It's often said by Conservative governments that businesses are the leaders in adaptation and innovation, yet not always is this the case, and this is one example. Not necessarily is it a natural process that companies will adapt and adopt and innovate to their own self-interest. This is a case where, in many cases, companies who have been forced in other jurisdictions to adopt extended producer responsibilities lower the amount of packaging and, lo and behold, they discover that had they done this a lot earlier, they would have saved money. They've discovered that it actually saves them money. It reduces their shipping costs. It reduces their costs of purchasing packaging. By being innovative, by being forced by regulation and by new rules around extended producer responsibility, they indeed discover that the adaptation and innovation process, if it had been undertaken by them earlier, would have saved them money.

There is a role for government to play, to nudge along because even corporate inertia happens to have cost money for companies. It is sometimes a good thing that people are forced as well as corporations are forced to change their behaviours because it leads to self-discovery. It leads to saving them money.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The committee stands adjourned until 7:30 p.m.

[The committee adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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