



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, December 6, 2021

Day 137

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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Milliken, Nicholas, Calgary-Currie (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (Ind)
Bilous, Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
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Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (NDP),
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
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Eggen, David, Edmonton-North West (NDP),
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Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP)
Toews, Hon. Travis, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)
Toor, Devinder, Calgary-Falconridge (UC)
Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC)
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Party standings:

United Conservative: 20

New Democrat: 24

Independent: 2

Vacant: 1

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Singh

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Frey (formerly Glasgo)
Irwin
Rosin
Rowswell
Sweet
van Dijken
Walker

Select Special Child and Youth Advocate Search Committee

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Jones

Goehring
Lovely
Nixon, Jeremy
Pancholi
Sabir
Smith
Turton

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Lovely
Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

Amery
Carson
Frey (formerly Glasgo)
Gotfried
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Loewen
Pancholi
Reid
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Dang
Dreeshen
Ganley
Long
Stephan

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

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Long
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Deol
Goehring
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Neudorf
Sabir
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Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
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Dang
Frey (formerly Glasgo)
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Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Smith
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Armstrong-Homeniuk
Deol
Ganley
Gotfried
Loyola
Neudorf
Renaud
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Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Ms Phillips
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

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Pancholi
Renaud
Rowswell
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Toor
Turton
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Select Special Committee on Real Property Rights

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Frey (formerly Glasgo)
Ganley
Hanson
Milliken
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Dach
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Getson
Guthrie
Lovely
Rehn
Singh
Turton
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, December 6, 2021

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Members, please remain standing as I intend to make a statement about the 32nd anniversary of l'École Polytechnique as well as for the playing of our national anthem.

Statement by the Speaker

32nd Anniversary of l'École Polytechnique Shootings

The Speaker: Hon. members, today marks the 32nd anniversary of l'École Polytechnique shootings in Montreal. On December 6, 1989, a man opened fire into a classroom at the technological university, killing 14 women and injuring others. On this tragic anniversary we reflect on the lives lost and the contributions these young women would have made to society. Most of the victims were studying engineering; one was a nursing student, and another worked in the finance department of the school. The unifying characteristic was that they were all young women who lost their lives on that day 32 years ago. Let us observe a moment of silence to honour these losses and commit to doing whatever we can to ensure this type of violence against women is never repeated.

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

Recording:

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein has a statement to make.

Addiction Treatment

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. James was an average guy, hard working, easy to get along with, and had a great sense of humour. He showed up at our shelter one night, and if you had met him, you would never have guessed that he was experiencing homelessness caused by debilitating addiction. After months in the shelter he asked for help, and he moved into our step-up housing program. We got him in and on a wait-list for treatment. Weeks went by, and his hope in recovery started to fade. Then one night

he showed up under the influence. We were a sober program, but I knew in that moment that if I turned him away, I would likely not see him again.

We talked on the steps for hours. He was overcome with guilt and grief at the loss of his sobriety. That night I found a room for him away from the other guys. I sat with him, prayed with him until he fell asleep, and then checked on him throughout the night. The next day he got back to the business of recovery, and eventually a treatment bed became available.

Mr. Speaker, that was 16 years ago. Today our addiction crisis is even worse. Many seeking sobriety are still not able to access treatment. This crisis requires a commitment to investing in treatment and long-term recovery. We were committed to funding 4,000 annual treatment spaces, and now, only two years later, it was announced that Alberta's government has funded more than 8,000 addiction and treatment spaces annually.

This means that 8,000 more Albertans like James will be able to access medical detox treatment and recovery services every year, establishing Alberta as a leader in treating addictions. Alberta's government has eliminated user fees for publicly funded treatment. This comes from the belief that recovery is possible and that no Albertan should be left without access to life-saving treatment and recovery services. There are thousands of Albertans who live their lives in recovery from addiction, as evidenced by my friend James. Recovery is possible. This government is building a system of care that supports recovery.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence against Women

Ms Renaud: It's been over 30 years since a violent, deadly act of misogyny shook our country to its core and December 6 was designated as the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence against Women. It's vital that we acknowledge that deadly and destructive misogyny still exists in our towns, villages, hamlets, cities, at home here in Alberta, throughout Canada, and across the globe.

Misogyny in Canada and around the world means that women, girls, gender-diverse individuals, and LGBTQ2S-plus members continue to encounter gender-based violence and discrimination. What has become all too alarmingly clear is that Indigenous women, women of colour, and particularly women who choose to wear a hijab are targeted for hate, violence, and discrimination. So today we remember.

Il y a plus de 30 ans depuis que 14 femmes ont été massacrées parce qu'elles étaient des femmes. Le 6 décembre nous nous souvenons du meurtre de 14 jeunes femmes qui a été commis à l'École Polytechnique de Montréal : Geneviève Bergeron, Hélène Colgan, Nathalie Croteau, Barbara Daigneault, Anne-Marie Edward, Maud Haviernick, Maryse Laganière, Maryse Leclair, Anne-Marie Lemay, Sonia Pelletier, Michèle Richard, Annie St-Arneault, Annie Turcotte, et Barbara Klucznik-Widajewicz. Alors que nous pleurons leur perte, nous nous souvenons de leur vie. Nous réaffirmons notre engagement à contrer la haine qui a conduit à cette tragédie et la misogynie qui existe encore aujourd'hui au Canada et dans le monde.

The National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence against Women is about remembering. It's time to take action via education, legislation, investment, and oversight. We have much more to do, Mr. Speaker.

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

Emergency Medical Service Response Times

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to start by thanking all the first responders who care for the people of our province. Your endless hours and your dedication and your hard work have not gone unnoticed and are truly appreciated by all Albertans. Today I stand before you to speak of the challenges of the EMS system in our province. Many members in this Chamber have echoed similar concerns from their constituents and EMS workers across the province.

Mr. Speaker, what are we waiting for? What is it going to take? Alberta's ambulance challenges did not start yesterday. They started over 10 years ago, when AHS took over the EMS services in our province. The pandemic has undoubtedly caused strain on an already broken EMS system. It doesn't help when EMS calls have increased by up to 30 per cent in some parts of our province, and this is, sadly, showing no sign of slowing down.

The substantial increase in call volume and staffing challenges is not unique to Alberta as most Canadian and many international jurisdictions are facing similar challenges. We continue to see response decrease throughout my constituency. When ambulances aren't available, it has a cascading effect, leaving firefighters tied up at medical calls waiting for transport. Ambulances are increasingly being sucked into the city of Calgary.

1:40

Mr. Speaker, an Airdrie resident waited for an ambulance to drive from Airdrie to Linden, about 67 kilometres, for a sick child. The fire department had to stay on that scene for an agonizing half an hour or more for AHS to arrive. Real-life stories like this are why making changes to our EMS system is so important. I am grateful for the countless meetings I've had with constituents, local EMS workers, and our Health minister on this issue. The Minister of Health is working on several additional initiatives to manage the demand on EMS resources. Albertans deserve a fast and effective emergency response – my constituents certainly do – and I will continue to fight for improvements.

Health Care Workers

Mr. Deol: On Thursday I listened in shock as the Member for Peace River stood in this House and attacked health care workers. The member accused Alberta Health Services of holding a knife to the throats of Alberta communities. He accused Alberta Health Services of abandoning sick and dying Albertans. He accused Alberta Health Services of authoritarianism. This is shameful behaviour that should be condemned. Instead, it was applauded by his fellow UCP MLAs eager to find a scapegoat for their failures in this fourth wave.

But beyond being tone deaf and offensive, this type of language from a member of the Legislature is also deeply concerning for our front-line workers, who have spent months being threatened, harassed, and even attacked by those who don't believe in the realities of this pandemic. I read stories about nurses being assaulted, about how health care workers receive death threats, e-mails filled with misogyny, racism, anti-Semitism, and other hate. Accusing front-line health care workers, who have battled this pandemic day in and day out, of holding a knife to the throats of Albertans is a disgusting statement that could put the health and safety of our health care workers at risk.

This government was slow to act to protect our hospitals from the protests of those who oppose masking and vaccines. This government did nothing at all as our hospitals filled and our health care system nearly collapsed. On this side of the House we stand with

health care workers and thank them for their service during this pandemic. We recognize the stress and hardship they have been through, and we thank them for all their sacrifices. We denounce any threat of violence or hate towards those who are fighting this pandemic and saving lives. The comments of the Member for Peace River are wrong, dangerous, and appalling. Our health care workers deserve an apology from that government member and the Premier. They deserve a government that is committed to treating them with respect. They deserve better than the UCP.

Thank you.

Rural Health Care

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, our Alberta rural health care system is under great strain. Prior to 2009 health care services in Alberta were delivered by a number of regional health authorities. Each of these boards was responsible for ensuring that adequate services were provided for their particular region. When the local health authorities were dissolved and amalgamated into Alberta Health Services, we were told that this change would not affect the level of health care services in rural communities. We now know that this is not the case.

In my riding of Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock we are experiencing a shortage of doctors, a series of emergency department closures, and a shortage of EMS service. Over the past year my riding has been hit by a series of temporary emergency department closures. During these closures ambulance services need to be rerouted to hospitals in other communities, patients are sent to other centres, and some patients are even rerouted to services at local pharmacies.

On top of that, Mr. Speaker, there are also systemic issues with the availability of ambulance services in rural communities. Alberta has completed its centralization of EMS dispatch under the AHS umbrella. Again, we were told that this change would not affect EMS response times in rural Alberta, and again this has proven to not be the case. Instead, we have seen a shortage of EMS services, leading to slower response times.

AHS is now implementing a vaccine mandate on health care workers. They claim this will have no negative impact on service, but my constituents are concerned. With staff shortages already a problem, they worry that service levels will continue to deteriorate in rural Alberta. The Minister of Health is currently reviewing capacity issues within AHS. The concerns in rural Alberta around AHS performance must be recognized and dealt with within this review.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Front-line Responders

Ms Sweet: Mr. Speaker, as we approach the holidays, I am thankful for all Alberta's front-line workers, who gave so much to keep us safe and healthy even in times as trying and as difficult as these. This week I visited all the front-line responders – firefighters, paramedics, police, and our civilian staff – in Edmonton-Manning to give them poinsettias as a small token of thanks for all of their work. This is a small token of thanks that I have towards the men and women who give so much to ensure the people of Edmonton-Manning have a safe and healthy holiday.

While this pandemic has been hard on all Albertans, I know how especially difficult it has been for those on the front lines. They spend long hours in stressful conditions and are faced day in and day out with a deadly disease. Many of them will be on duty come Christmas and New Year's and will be away from their families, working to protect yours and mine and all Albertans', Mr. Speaker. Many are dealing with deep cuts from this UCP government in the

aftermath of this government's fight with doctors and nurses and the additional stress that comes from dealing with the unacceptable and vile threats of those who don't believe in this pandemic or in vaccines.

As we head into the holiday season, I urge all members to think about our front-line responders, see their sacrifices, see how much they do on a daily basis to protect the lives of Albertans, and give them the thanks they deserve. To every doctor, nurse, paramedic, firefighter, police officer, and every other front-line responder in this province, I want you to know that our NDP caucus thanks you and vows to stand with you during this pandemic and beyond to ensure that you get the respect you deserve and the supports you need to continue doing your work.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Economic Recovery and Growth

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The past two years have been tough on all Albertans. There have been lost jobs and lost income, many small businesses have had to close, and many have had their whole way of life turned upside down. That's why it is so important that the government has the economic recovery plan in the works. There's a lot of work ahead, but while things continue to be tough, there are many good things happening in Alberta that are worth highlighting.

Alberta is projected to lead the country in GDP growth. Dow Chemical recently announced plans to build the world's first zero carbon emission ethylene complex. This will be the largest private-sector investment to happen in Alberta in decades, reaching over \$10 billion and creating thousands of jobs. Shell Canada's refinery complex recently announced plans to build a large-scale solar installation in Alberta's Industrial Heartland, and this follows repeated investments in renewable energy in Alberta. Amazon announced that its web services chose Alberta to build their second hub. This will be the largest tech-sector investment in Alberta history at \$4.3 billion, creating, again, thousands of jobs.

The government also recently announced an investment from their TIER fund of \$176 million to cut emissions by 7 million tonnes by 2030 and creating another 5,600 jobs for Albertans. The government has also released a hydrogen road map, which will build on Alberta's immense success in attracting investment in the hydrogen sector, creating even more investment and jobs for years to come.

In November Alberta's unemployment rate fell to the lowest since 2020, creating an additional 15,000 jobs, and that is just the beginning. Albertans have always been tough, industrious people with an entrepreneurial spirit. They have never wanted handouts, just an opportunity to succeed. That's why this province will be the most prosperous place in the country, and it will continue to drive diversity for the future and for generations to come.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Premier's Remarks on Oil and Gas Industry Opponents' Funding

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, the UCP's approach to our energy sector has involved tarnishing Alberta's international reputation: a war room that investigates cartoons, steals logos, fakes being journalists, all while shielding itself from accountability and transparency; an inquiry into so-called un-Albertan activities that found no wrongdoing, nothing, not a thing. The inquiry even urged the government to stop using the phrase "anti-Albertan" since it was not accurate. The government spent millions and years investigating

and found nothing. They gave an extension, they boosted the budget, and still found nothing to prove the Premier's claims of illegal activities targeting Alberta.

But instead of accepting that their hypothesis was wrong – and Albertans expect their government to care equally about the economy and the environment – the Premier went out and repeated these very claims that had been debunked by his own inquiry at a cost of \$3.5 million. Even knowing that what he was saying was disproven by the inquiry he created, the Premier continued to make these claims about conspiracies. Now he's being sued, asked to take it back and apologize, and he expects Albertans to cover his legal costs. The Premier used the phrase "personal responsibility" to defend his lack of action on the pandemic, to explain why he was so slow to promote masks or to take the necessary steps to keep us safe, but when it comes to his own actions, he expects us to pay.

It's normal for the government to cover such costs, but this is different. Albertans should not be on the hook to pay for legal bills of a Premier whose statements were debunked by an inquiry that he held. Albertans who were told day after day to expect a fiscal reckoning shouldn't have to pay because the Premier is too arrogant to admit when he's wrong and too stubborn to apologize. The Premier is facing the consequences of his action. Rather than pass the bill onto us, he should take some personal responsibility and pay it himself.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Health System Capacity

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, a couple of weeks ago I asked the Premier what he was going to do to help the 30,000 people in Lethbridge with no family doctor. Since then we've learned that the number of people seeking health care is actually much bigger, 45,000. The Chinook regional hospital's medical director said that the city is facing a crisis. They need as many as 30 new doctors immediately. Once again, rather than trite talking points, will the Premier tell us what he is going to do to find those doctors other than attacking their profession?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, as the hon. the Leader of the Opposition knows, there are more physicians working in Alberta today than under her government or at any time in Alberta history. There are more nurses working now. There are more rural physicians working now. We've added \$80 million to the budget for rural physician retention and recruitment. I'm pleased to be informed that the Chinook primary care network and AHS are interviewing nine new family physicians for positions in the city of Lethbridge, and we look forward to the local partners that are continuing to make progress to ensure there is adequate support from family physicians in that area.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, more billing codes is not more doctors, and the 45,000 people who don't have doctors know it.

Now, there are 24 communities with bed reductions and scheduled ER closures as well. There are doctors and nurses and front-line staff burning out because of this government's repeated failure to manage the pandemic, and the Premier keeps on threatening their jobs, so before the Member for Peace River starts raging about AHS supposedly, quote, holding a knife to the throat

of remote communities, will the Premier put down his knife and stop threatening health care in rural Alberta?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've made a historic investment of an additional \$80 million to recruit and retain rural physicians – there are about 750 of those physicians; that's about \$100,000 per physician – something the NDP never did.

With respect to the AHS vaccine mandate we do believe that health care workers working with patients should reduce their risk of transmission by being vaccinated, which is why we respect the AHS mandate, but it was unacceptable, it would be unacceptable to fire people in areas where that would reduce health care services, and that's what the NDP wants us to do.

Ms Notley: Well, in fact, Mr. Speaker, it's his irresponsible rhetoric and that from his caucus members like the Member for Peace River that is making this pandemic worse, putting vacations ahead of vaccinations, threatening job cuts and wage rollbacks, attacking doctors in their driveways. Will the Premier agree to developing and releasing a comprehensive plan for recruitment and retention to undo the damage he's done, and will he agree to our emergency motion on this matter today so we can start discussing how to fix the situation for Albertans who need health care?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, none of that is true. This government has never threatened to fire people in the health care system. In fact, we have more nurses and doctors working now than ever before. Perhaps what she is referring to is our campaign commitment, on which we were elected, to do more competitive contracting for ancillary services like food and laundry, but if there are successful vendors – guess what – they will still hire people to do food and laundry. We want to move as many dollars as we can to front-line clinical services.

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

Surgery Wait Times and Premier's Leadership

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, we're talking about Albertans and their experiences. Cheryl Sword has two ovarian cysts. They cause her pain every day. Her surgery was delayed multiple times, most recently because of the UCP's inaction in the fourth wave. She says that when she found out, she sat on the floor and cried. Now, when the CBC reported on Cheryl, they also asked this government for the latest number of cancelled surgeries because the 15,000 number is now a month out of date and they continue to hide it. So I will ask the Premier again: can he tell us what the current number of cancelled surgeries because of the fourth wave is, or does he just not know?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, we regret anybody having to wait for health care, of course. The NDP drove up surgical wait times in almost every area after spending more money. What people expect is results, which is why this government has delivered on nearly a billion dollars in additional funding in the health care budget to reduce surgical wait times. The hon. the Minister of Health will be providing Albertans with an update on a plan to get on top of the surgical delays that were a result of the fourth wave. We'll be doing that later this week.

Ms Notley: The Premier will not answer the question in this House, probably because that would involve accepting responsibility for his failures when he went on vacation in August. Let's talk about that, because while the evidence shows that the Premier was

checked out, he keeps spinning a story where he was in charge and fully briefed the whole time. Now, if that is true, if he was making critical public health decisions from a different time zone, if he was in charge, then Albertans have a right to know: where was he exactly, which country, and how exactly did you get there? On whose jet?

An Hon. Member: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 1:56.

Mr. Kenney: The NDP continues to be obsessed with its kind of union-rules approach to governing. Apparently, when she was Premier, when she went to her cottage or wherever, she would book off, turn off her phone, and be completely inaccessible. I can tell you that I was on the phone repeatedly with the Minister of Labour and Immigration when he took his family for some time away from Calgary. Do you know what, Mr. Speaker? I spoke to him one time. He said that he'd been on the phone eight hours that day. This government continues to work every day.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, there was a state of emergency when I was Premier, and where was I? Guess what. Not in Spain. I was right here. It is important that leaders get downtime – no issue here with that – but the Premier's story hinges on him making decisions in a time zone eight hours ahead of ours. Here's the truth: he was never leading in the fourth wave, he's not leading on these surgical backlogs, he's not even the preferred leader of his own party. The Premier was either on the clock, and Albertans have a right to know where he was, or he wasn't, and they need to know who was. Which is it?

Mr. Kenney: Once again, any responsible minister, any responsible head of government is accessible to deal with ordinary government business and extraordinary government business seven days a week and 365 days a year. The real question is: why did the NDP operate differently? When they took personal time, why did they not do government business? I can assure . . . [interjections] Mr. Speaker, I couldn't care less where the Leader of the Opposition goes while on personal time, but I can tell you this: unlike her, this government and its ministers work every day of the week.

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

Kindergarten to Grade 6 Draft Curriculum

Ms Hoffman: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, in March news surfaced that the Northwest Territories was considering breaking its long-term relationship with Alberta when it came to curriculum. The minister denied it at every turn. The NWT is imminently announcing that they are going to end their relationship with Alberta and that they're going to be instead teaching British Columbia's curriculum. Many of the accusations say that it's because this curriculum is racist, written by the Premier's racist friend. Can the Premier confirm that this is the case and tell Albertans exactly why the NWT no longer believes our curriculum is good enough for their kids?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member wants to make defamatory statements about a fellow Canadian, I encourage her to do it outside the House, where she is not protected from defamation law.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, 95 per cent of Alberta teachers don't support this Premier's curriculum. Nearly every school board has refused to pilot it in their classrooms. Parents were shut out, racists were invited in, and this is the result, Premier. The Northwest Territories said in March that, quote, the B.C. curriculum is modern

and one where Indigenous world views seem to be embraced and encouraged. The exact opposite has been said about this Premier's new Alberta curriculum. So will the Premier commit to stopping this horrible curriculum being imposed and get back to the table with Indigenous leaders?

2:00

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, with respect to Indigenous content the current curriculum, the one that the NDP delivered in our schools for four years, between K to 6, has approximately 35 references to First Nations or Indigenous people. The proposed K to 6 social studies curriculum presented by this minister takes that to nearly 350 references to Indigenous people, a 1,000 per cent increase. There may need to be improvements and changes, and we're listening actively, but what we won't do is impose a left-wing ideological curriculum on Alberta kids, like the NDP sought to do.

Ms Hoffman: This Premier won't insert evidence. He won't insert facts. He won't consult with Indigenous, Black, First Nations – the list goes on, Premier. Japanese Canadians are angry. Francophone Canadians are angry. You know, what is clear: this Premier has his earplugs in, his blinders on, and he doesn't care about getting this curriculum right. But to Albertans I want to say that you've got a bunch of people right here who are going to be working so hard to make sure that we put forward a curriculum that works for you. We're going to be fighting in this next election to stand up for Alberta kids and bring a curriculum forward that will serve every Albertan.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order was noted at 2:01. I had trouble hearing the question. [interjections] Order. Order.

Speaker's Ruling Oral Question Period Practices

The Speaker: You know, the unfortunate part about disorder in the Assembly is the negative consequences paid by members who have their questions at the end of the rotation. I know that all members would like to be able to ask questions in the Assembly, but time is limited. Your actions have immediate consequences on your colleagues who also would like to ask questions later.

Kindergarten to Grade 6 Draft Curriculum (continued)

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, there is so much misinformation. For example, I don't believe that there is a current specific reference to the history of Black people in Alberta that the curriculum taught in our schools under the NDP. For the first time ever there are multiple specific references, content on Black Canadian history in the proposed draft curriculum. A 1,000 per cent increase in content . . . [interjection]

The Speaker: Order. All I can hear is the Leader of the Opposition carrying on about all sorts of things.

Mr. Kenney: She wasn't carrying on about Black history in the curriculum.

A 1,000 per cent increase in Indigenous history content in this proposed curriculum. I'll tell you that in their proposed social curriculum zero reference to Confederation, to the rule of law, to our military history, to 120,000 Canadian war dead. Shame on them, Mr. Speaker.

Postsecondary Education Funding

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, recent data from Statistics Canada has shown that the analysis of the MacKinnon panel was embarrassingly inadequate and that Alberta actually spends \$2,700 less than B.C. per student, rather than the \$4,000 more that was claimed. This UCP government has used this faulty data to justify almost \$700 million in cuts to postsecondaries. This is incompetence of the highest order, and our students, our future leaders, are paying the price. Will the Premier admit that this government fudged this information so that he could make devastating cuts to postsecondary?

Mr. Kenney: So let's get this straight, Mr. Speaker. The NDP here is accusing a former NDP Finance minister, who led a panel with respected former public servants, including a former Liberal member of this Legislature, of purposely producing misinformation? Why doesn't he go and say that outside the House? Why do they do the drive-by smears, attacks, and defamation under protection of privilege in this place? Shame on them.

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, I would be delighted to say that outside of the House.

Mr. Speaker, the cost of living is taking a massive toll from postsecondary students. I hear from them every day. Steeper interest rates on student loans, cuts to student aid, cuts to other forms of income support: all of this leads to students piling on debt or abandoning their career aspirations altogether. Will the Premier explain to students why he's willing to let their education costs skyrocket at a time when they can barely make ends meet?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, this was not simply an assertion by the MacKinnon panel. Multiple studies have identified that Alberta universities have been at the highest end of the per capita and per-student cost curve in all of North America. We support higher education. We continue to subsidize it at the highest per capita levels in the country. But that NDP left us with nearly a \$10 billion structural deficit, and those university students would have to pay that off through higher taxes for the rest of their lives. It's in the interests of young Albertans that we get our fiscal house in order.

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, faulty data, massive cuts, steep cost increases, and not a shred of remorse from this terrible government. Shame on them. The faculty are fleeing our institutions. We're seeing young adults leave the province at a rate not seen since the 1980s. Premier, how many of our future leaders will have to leave this province altogether before you own up to the major mistakes you made and take serious action to restore funding in our postsecondary schools and make tuition affordable again?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, tuition levels in Alberta are below the national average. The per-student funding at the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary are the highest of the top 15 universities in Canada. But why does the NDP keep talking down this province? Last year Alberta led Canada in population growth, and all signs are that people from across the country, young and old, are moving in large numbers to enjoy the renewal of the Alberta advantage as we lead the country in economic growth, in job creation, and in incomes.

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

Economic Recovery and Growth

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The second-quarter fiscal update showed one of the most dramatic improvements to provincial

finances in Alberta history with a stunning \$12.4 billion decrease in the deficit. This is on the heels of several large investments . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora will come to order. You know, I found that other members inside the Assembly gave the courtesy to members of the opposition to ask a question in relative silence. I hope that the same courtesy will be provided to the Member for Cardston-Siksika.

Mr. Schow: May I start over, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: No.

Mr. Schow: All right.

This is on the heels of several large investments totalling \$10 billion that will create more than 10,000 new jobs, including the largest ever investment in Alberta's technology sector from Amazon Web Services. Can the Premier tell us how Alberta's government has paved the way for these and other remarkable economic developments?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the fastest economic growth in Canada, second-fastest job growth in Canada. Last Friday StatsCan confirmed 15,000 net new jobs created here in the month of November, 118,000 net new jobs in the first 11 months of 2021. This isn't an accident. Alberta's recovery plan is working. The job-creation tax cut, the red tape reduction strategy, the innovation employment grant, the jobs now program: I could go on and on.

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

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that many forecasters, including the Conference Board of Canada and several major banks, predict that Alberta will lead the nation in economic growth in 2022 and given that RBC predicts and RBC Economics predicts that the province will continue to attract significant investment, like the recently announced \$2.5 billion Northern Petrochemical project in Grande Prairie, can the Premier fill us in on some other exciting projects under way in this province?

Mr. Kenney: He mentioned RBC, Mr. Speaker. Interestingly enough, that's just one of the firms. They announced 300 high-tech, high-paying jobs that they're moving from Toronto to Calgary. I just got out of a meeting, just before question period, with a major national manufacturing company that informed me of their intention of investing a quarter of a billion dollars in this province to create a thousand high-paying manufacturing jobs. Tonight I'm meeting with investors from Toronto looking at investing potentially hundreds of millions of dollars in this province. I'll tell you, it's bad news for the NDP, but it's great news for working Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that our cornerstone industries are helping usher in a technological renaissance in the province and given that oil production in the province hit a staggering 119 million barrels of oil in October, an all-time high, much to the chagrin of the members opposite, can the Premier tell us about some exciting innovations in the oil and gas sector that are creating jobs, cutting emissions, and positioning the province as a global leader in production?

2:10

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, while the NDP is attending Extinction Rebellion rallies, while they're pretending that we can replace the

hundred-billion-dollar export of oil with a bunch of windmills, I'll tell you what – trigger warning for the NDP – last month was the highest month of oil production, shipments, and sales in the history of Alberta. We ran on pipelines. Line 3 is done. TMX is on track. And if the NDP's left-wing allies would get out of the way, we'd complete Coastal GasLink as well.

Election Oversight

Mr. Dang: As the Premier and the government circle the drain of public opinion, they're making desperate attempts to stack the deck in their favour. First, they fired the Election Commissioner, who was actively investigating the UCP. Then they introduced a law to silence their critics, and now they've voted against a motion, that we introduced Friday, that would give Elections Alberta funding to reinstate the position of the Election Commissioner. Experts have already stated that Alberta was truly ahead of the curve when it defined the position and independent role of an Election Commissioner, and the removal of that position was a big step backwards. Why does the government refuse to reinstate an office of an Election Commissioner?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I couldn't get all of the question that the Member for Edmonton-South was asking, but I suppose that his question is: why wouldn't we reinstate the Election Commissioner? I can assure this House that we've made changes that allow the Chief Electoral Officer, like in other jurisdictions, to be able to perform those functions. Nothing has changed from what B.C., Northwest Territories, Ontario, Quebec do with their electoral laws.

Mr. Dang: Given that what has changed is that this government fired the Election Commissioner who was investigating the UCP leadership campaign, which racked up over \$210,000 worth of fines, and given that other investigations into activities such as the UCP's PACs have also dragged out for over three years and given that the UCP refused to fund the hiring of an Election Commissioner, it is unquestionable that this government is in no hurry to hear back from the findings of those investigations. My question to the minister is simple. How long does the government think that the people of Alberta should wait for accountability when it comes to our democracy? Is he fine for us to wait indefinitely when his own party is facing these allegations?

Mr. Madu: Mr. Speaker, I can tell the hon. Member for Edmonton-South what the people of Alberta want. They want us to get big money out of our politics. They want us to repeal the AFL loophole that allowed Gil McGowan to funnel hundreds of millions of dollars to the NDP and their allies across the province. If the member opposite is interested in making sure that we defend our elections here in Alberta, they should support us in making sure that we get rid of big money from politics.

Mr. Dang: Given that I think Albertans and my constituents want this minister to call an election and given that the UCP leadership race is currently under RCMP investigation for alleged voter fraud and given that the UCP is trying to now remove the RCMP from Alberta and given that when the Chief Electoral Officer requested a four-month extension in 2020 to complete the investigation into the kamikaze scandal, the Justice minister said no, and given that now we have no clue where that investigation is at or the status of other investigations into UCP PACs, does the Justice minister believe

that Albertans deserve to know the outcome of investigations stemming from the last election before we go into another election in 2023? If so, what would he personally do . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Madu: Mr. Speaker, I can tell the hon. member that, you know, first and foremost, in keeping with our commitment, we have put forward legislation that would ensure that we have an election here on the last Monday in May, every four years, in this particular province. One more thing. If that hon. member is interested in what Albertans think of their elections, they ought to be working with us to make sure that we get rid of big money, the AFL, hundreds of millions of dollars, out of Alberta politics.

Drug Harm Reduction Strategies

Ms Sigurdson: More than four Albertans are tragically dying each day due to drug poisoning deaths. Albertans cannot access recovery if toxic drugs take their lives first. Also, people who relapse must have certainty that they will be safe if they use again; 2020 was the deadliest year on record for drug poisoning deaths, and 2021 will surpass it. These deaths are preventable. It is proven that access to harm reduction services saves lives. The UCP mischaracterizes these immediate life-saving policies. When will the UCP finally acknowledge that harm reduction services save lives?

Mr. Ellis: You know, Mr. Speaker, a few weeks back I had an opportunity to speak to a grand chief from northern Alberta. He told me a story of two members who had seven children. They had spent all of their money on drugs and alcohol. Those seven children were starving. Let's go over the NDP policy: more supervised consumption sites, provide a taxpayer-funded supply of drugs, that they term safe supply, and drug testing. I ask that member: how do any one of those policies help those seven children?

Ms Sigurdson: Given that the Premier has inaccurately stated that harm reduction facilitates addiction and that people who support harm reduction are dismissive of recovery and given that Dr. Tyndall of the UBC's School of Population and Public Health has called the Premier's characterization of harm reduction categorically false – he said, quote, to say that harm reduction hasn't made any difference is against all of the research and all of the experience – will the associate minister join health experts in condemning the Premier's inaccurate and dangerous claims?

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, we've always said that overdose prevention sites have a role in the continuum of care. It was this government that eliminated user fees, it was this government that created not 4,000 but 8,000 spaces, and it was this government that has started the construction on five world-class therapeutic communities. If the NDP had their way, those people would be living in pain and suffering. We're going to stop that.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that the UCP quietly released data right before Indigenous Peoples Day, in June, regarding overdose death spikes and given that the issue of systemic racism and inter-generational trauma means that people experiencing these traumas may not be ready to access recovery services and given that Melissa Peters, an advocate for people with addictions, said that not everyone is ready for treatment and that should be okay, what is the associate minister doing to immediately support Indigenous people to ensure that treatment recognizes the trauma the Indigenous people have experienced?

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, actually, I spoke with a chief only several hours ago, quite frankly. All of the chiefs that I have been speaking to: you know what they want? You know what they want for their people? They want treatment. They want recovery. When I talk to them about supervised consumption sites in their communities, when I talk to them about safe supply, when I talk to them about drug testing, not only do they laugh at me, but they reject it. What they want is to get their people out of the illness of addiction, raise them up, and help them, and that's what we're going to do. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Justice Minister

Mr. Loewen: Mr. Speaker, it seems that half of the Premier's front bench is secretly and not so secretly campaigning for his job. In private, cabinet ministers insist that they do everything in their power to stop the least popular Premier in Canada by opposing his desired government policies. The worst kept secret in Alberta is that the Justice minister has been portraying himself to groups of supporters as the Premier's chief opponent. Which of the Premier's bad policies can the Justice minister publicly take credit for stopping? Is it true that you're trying to replace him before 2023?

Mr. Madu: Mr. Speaker, I have no idea what the Member for Central Peace-Notley is talking about.

Mr. Loewen: Given that the Justice minister is apparently quite fond of spinning elaborate stories, as we've just seen, and given that rumour has it that certain officials in the Justice department and the Premier himself wanted harsher COVID enforcement for churches and pastors and given that under this Justice minister's policies more pastors were arrested in Alberta than in any other jurisdiction in North America, can the Justice minister confirm that he personally foiled the Premier's plan and, in fact, stopped this government policy to arrest even more religious leaders?

Mr. Madu: Mr. Speaker, I am proud of this government's record throughout the pandemic to ensure that we have minimal – minimal – intervention that affects our places of worship, our businesses, and our people compared to the rest of the country. I am proud of the record of this government. That said, we are a nation and people of laws, and I as Justice minister have a responsibility to ensure that we maintain that tradition.

2:20

Mr. Loewen: Given that the Justice minister has been selling himself as the lone good guy in cabinet and given that he has allegedly told supporters that he blocked the Premier and Prime Minister Trudeau's plan to call in the military to enforce lockdowns, is this all just hot air, or can the Justice minister publicly confirm that the Premier was about to call in the military and enact this as a government policy until the minister intervened? Albertans deserve to know. Yes or no, Minister? Yes or no?

Mr. Madu: Mr. Speaker, I have no idea what the Member for Central Peace-Notley is talking about.

Fort McMurray Flood Damage Mitigation and Emergency Preparedness

Ms Sweet: Mr. Speaker, last week, while I was in Fort McMurray, I heard multiple residents, business owners, and community leaders talk about their future. They want to build a strong community where they can raise a family, build a business, and retire. However, after living through two one-in-one-hundred-year natural disasters

within five years, the community is feeling a bit rattled. The Premier was in Fort McMurray and saw flooded homes and businesses. He pledged to help but then left the municipality to fend for itself on flood mitigation, contributing zero dollars to a new berm to protect the downtown. Why did the province abandon the promise to protect Fort McMurray from flooding?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, we have the disaster recovery program, which we administer. Fort McMurray has been a beneficiary of that. I will say that my ministry and our government: we don't play favourites. It's a pretty strict policy. Those that have situations to get the funding, get it, and those that don't, don't. We've worked closely with the municipality of Fort McMurray, and we are making sure that all of the benefits that are due to them, they will get.

Ms Sweet: Well, given that many small businesses are still rebuilding their storefronts after the 2020 flood and given that I talked to a small-business owner who reopened their business again after the flood but are worried about the additional costs by operating downtown, including increases to their insurance and the pending increase to property taxes because the municipality is stuck with a \$257 million bill for flood mitigation, one the province has refused to help with, and given that these small businesses are critical to diversify Fort McMurray's economy and help build a strong community, to the minister: what has this government done since the flood to help keep costs down for small businesses? Try to be specific.

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

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is significant investment that has been taking place over the last decade when it comes to flood mitigation, including in Fort McMurray but in communities all across the province, most recently, of course, with the Springbank dam proceeding. It's on the Bow River. Let me tell you one of the biggest investments that we've made – I'm proud of this – Alberta Environment released all of the flood mapping that the NDP kept locked up, millions and millions of dollars' worth of flood mapping. One of the first things we did was to release that so municipalities could make concrete plans to be able to fulfill their responsibility to manage emergency management within their community.

Ms Sweet: Well, given that I'm talking about Fort McMurray and given that this government's lack of prevention is just one part of the issue with the lack of emergency preparedness and a concise plan when another flood or fire hits the region – and it's frustrating to the residents of Wood Buffalo – and given that this lack of forward thinking and emergency preparedness creates an environment of uncertainty, causing many small-business owners to think twice about reopening their businesses or new owners from even investing in the area, to the minister. Community members and small-business owners are looking for predictability and a plan for emergency preparedness. Why does this government not take the threat of future disaster seriously, listen to local businesses, and work to develop a plan?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, our ministry works closely with municipalities. Under the disaster recovery program uninsured losses are covered at this point at 90 per cent. Here is the good thing about that. We work with municipalities, with our one-and-done policy, to encourage them to work with owners of property to rebuild outside of the flood zone. It doesn't make sense to any taxpayer to rebuild in the same location over and over and over again when you know it's going to flood again. It seems like that's

what the NDP wants us to do, but taxpayers provincially and municipally want a more common-sense approach. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Women's Shelters and Affordable Housing

Member Irwin: Today, December 6, is the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence against Women. Since the beginning of the pandemic, data shows that there has been a shadow pandemic of intensifying violence against women and girls. Calls for this government to take this seriously continue to go unheeded, and reports from the front lines are dire. WIN House Edmonton, which provides a safe place and emergency services for those fleeing abuse, had to turn away 1,669 people last year. To the minister. This is incredibly alarming. What does this government have to say to those on the front lines who are turning away thousands of people who are desperate for help?

Mr. Luan: Mr. Speaker, this is a great question. This is one of the reasons that two weeks ago the Premier and I stood with stakeholders in the community. We announced \$21.5 million of additional funding to support people who are struggling with homelessness. With that, two additional million dollars went to the shelters. When I quote what the significant stakeholders say about our action – this is from Mayor Sohi. "We have identified the shelter gap in recent meetings with the Premier and his ministers, and they have responded" within two weeks.

Member Irwin: Given that front-line shelter workers have been clear that what's needed most is funding – funding is crucial for Indigenous and rural women who are disproportionately impacted – funding that could be used for critical services like staff who could provide direct support for survivors of violence, and that organizations doing this work have stressed the need for investments in affordable housing and second-stage homes, will this minister commit immediately to increasing funding for women's shelters, lobby his counterpart in Seniors and Housing to reverse harmful cuts to affordable housing, and invest in housing, not in mats on the floor? We need more. Front-line workers are telling us that. Survivors are telling us that as well.

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

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, over the last year and a half, two years this Alberta government has supported funding to the tune of \$51.3 million to support programming and operations to over 50 shelters focused on supporting women and children fleeing family violence, an additional \$5 million in funding to women's emergency shelters to support safe isolation for those experiencing domestic violence during the pandemic, 41 family violence grants, valued at \$6.7 million, and two contracts worth \$337,000 to operate the provincial family violence info line, which has been a great resource.

Member Irwin: Given that we know that trans and nonbinary folks often struggle to find safe spaces when fleeing violence and given that these same people are often turned away from traditional women's shelters and given that we've heard reports of some shelters that are focused on improving their language and on being more inclusive while others are not adjusting their practices whatsoever, is the minister aware of this concern, and if so, what is he doing to ensure that there are shelter guidelines in place to make these spaces more safe and more welcoming for all Albertans who need to access them?

Mr. Luan: Mr. Speaker, beyond all of the dollars that were announced by my hon. colleague there, we also undertook a task force who are working comprehensively on revealing how we can best change the way we deliver programs so that we are coordinated, we are focused, not only addressing the women escaping from violence but also providing the home support for them. With that task force, not only the shelters will be there; the long-term and short-term supportive housing units will be there, too.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood is next.

Energy Industry Opposition

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The past couple of weeks have been eventful for our energy sector. We have seen threats of eco terrorism and a political party, which includes the NDP MLAs, passing a motion that supports Extinction Rebellion, which could lead to the increase of illegal blockades. Given that any form of illegal threats against our oil and gas infrastructure is not acceptable and given that this infrastructure employs thousands and is a major driver of our economy – the current circumstances prove that our oil and gas industry needs to be protected – to the minister: what is our government doing to protect Alberta's oil and gas industry?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, this House has passed legislation to protect infrastructure associated with the oil and gas industry, and we will continue to take steps to stop illegal action from taking place against some of the most important assets our province has. This is a sharp contrast from the NDP, who voted against that legislation. Their own policy division of the party has passed motions with the overwhelming majority support of their party, which has still not been condemned by the Official Opposition, calling on people to break the law and take illegal action to block coastal pipelines. Let me tell you that that's shameful. Shame on the NDP. This side of the House will defend our industry.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that it's obvious that the oil and gas industry is essential for the success of Alberta and, as we have just heard, our government is committed to the protection of Alberta's oil and gas sector and given that this comes with good reason as we are a global leader in environmental practices that have established us as a leader in carbon reduction, to the Minister of Environment and Parks: can you please share with this House our progress in respect to carbon reduction?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to say that this government has worked with industry to invest \$6.6 billion, combined with the TIER fund and industry money, to create tens of thousands of jobs inside the energy industry, all the while reducing 43 million tonnes of emissions by 2030. That's real action from this side of the House, hand in hand with our largest industries, a sharp contrast from the NDP, who brought in the job-killing carbon tax and could not even articulate one tonne of GHG emissions. Our way forward is through innovation and technology and working with our industry. They're trying to stop the oil and gas industry.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you to the minister again for that answer. Given that you would think that with all the information that proves

Alberta's oil and gas industry is a sustainable practice and that it is extremely dangerous for anyone to tamper with oil and gas infrastructure and given that our government has taken additional steps to protect critical infrastructure through the implementation of Bill 1, to the Minister of Justice: how exactly will Bill 1 ensure that our oil and gas industry will continue to be protected from illegal blockades and threats of eco terrorism?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for that question. Albertans have the right to protest, but they do not have the right to block or damage critical infrastructure. Individuals could face fines of up to \$10,000 and \$25,000 to first and subsequent offences as well as possibly going to jail for up to six months. Corporations that commit or counsel or direct an offence may also face fines of up to \$200,000. We know we must do everything to protect our critical infrastructure.

Occupational Health and Safety

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, last week the minister of labour celebrated his changes to Alberta's occupational health and safety laws, but who's not celebrating? Everyone else. Workers will see the minister's changes actually create loopholes around the requirements for workplace OH and S committees such that there will be fewer of them going forward. This does not improve worker safety. Can the minister explain why his version of making things safer, quote, easier to understand, is not having workplace safety committees?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, none of that is true because the referral to these committees and the representatives is going to be in the code, not in the act, so they will still exist. They will still continue to be available to employees and to the employers to continue to use these forums as a great way for workers and employers to continue to work together to be able to improve and make sure that our workplaces are going to continue to be safe in the province.

Ms Gray: Given that the changes mean fewer committees and given that the minister is weakening workplace safety – I worry that maybe he doesn't know what the impact will be – given that his changes mean lower standards for safety training – under these changes anyone can teach anything and claim that it's safety training, leading to fly-by-night operations and much lower quality, removing minimum training times, providing no minimum course content – why does the minister believe that lowering safety training standards will, quote, ensure healthy and safe workplaces?

Mr. Shandro: Well, Mr. Speaker, because that's not happening. That's not true at all. The changes to the OHS Act that have now been implemented are not going to be reducing safety in the workplaces. This is a way for us to, as technology changes, as throughout the last couple of decades all the new work that we can learn from other jurisdictions, improve the OHS Act to be able to make sure that it's better to understand for both workers and employers. That's exactly what's happened, and then we're going to continue with the next phase of the work in making sure that we do the same with the code, the next step.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, given that there were strong minimum standards that have been removed, given that this minister wants to pretend he's making workplaces safer when he is not, given that this government has been watering down workplace laws since day one – they claim to be cutting red tape, but what they're doing is actually encouraging Albertans to cut corners – given that these

moves put people at risk of injury and death, more people off the job site and in the ICU, why does the minister of labour believe his new job is best fulfilled by removing standards that were in place to keep workers safe?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, none of that is true. It is going to continue to be a focus of this government to improve workplace safety, to be able to work with the advocates, who want to be able to speak to government about improving workplace safety to reduce workplace incidents, that that member unfortunately continued to ignore when they were trying to work with that government, to try and advocate with that government. They continued to be ignored and we continue to hear that the previous government refused to work with those folks. We are going to meet with them, continue to work with those folks to improve workplace safety.

Campus Saint-Jean Funding

Ms Renaud: Last week I had the opportunity to meet with student leaders at Campus Saint-Jean to better understand how the UCP cuts have impacted them. This government inflicted a 19 per cent cut on Campus Saint-Jean, resulting in 100 courses being eliminated. Campus Saint-Jean attracts primarily unilingual students or bilingual French speakers, many of whom are now being disadvantaged by having their courses cut in their primary language, forcing them to leave the institution altogether. Why is the Minister of Advanced Education ignoring warnings of staff, students, and the francophone community and plowing ahead with these cuts?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite earlier talked about data, and I'd like to just quote some data from Statistics Canada from 2017-18. The University of Alberta received \$18,000 per student in funding from the provincial government. The average across the U15 is \$11,791. As you can see, Alberta institutions have operated at higher funding levels than their comparators for many years. As all Albertans know, we have a very challenging financial environment and fiscal environment that we need to work through together.

Ms Renaud: Given that the UCP announced their new parliamentary secretary for the Francophonie while neglecting funding for Campus Saint-Jean, it's clear that the francophone community of Alberta is just a talking point that this government won't act on, and given that Campus Saint-Jean is the only institution west of Manitoba to offer francophone postsecondary education, and under the UCP its very existence is in danger, will the Minister of Advanced Education commit to reversing the cuts to Campus Saint-Jean, protect Francophonie heritage and culture in Alberta, and allow students to actually finish their degrees in French?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, for additional clarity the government of Alberta does not provide funding to Campus Saint-Jean directly, just to be very clear. [interjections] I know the member wants to heckle, but the facts of the matter are that the government of Alberta provides funding to the University of Alberta. The University of Alberta subsequently makes its operational decisions about where to allocate its finances. This government does not believe in micromanaging the affairs of our postsecondary institutions. We believe in supporting institutional autonomy, and we'll work with them in making the best decisions possible.

Ms Renaud: Yeah. The dog ate the funding.

Given that the UCP has refused to match funding with the federal government on official languages, meaning millions of dollars have been left on the table by the UCP, and given that Campus Saint-Jean is in need of upgraded technology and long-deferred maintenance, leaving money on the table is another case of the UCP undermining the survival of Campus Saint-Jean and francophone education. Will the minister commit that he will stop leaving federal money on the table and invest it to support Campus Saint-Jean, or does he intend for his legacy to be the ending of true francophone education in Alberta?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, we haven't left any dollars on the table. We are in continued conversations with our counterparts in the federal government, looking at funding opportunities for Campus Saint-Jean. I did have the opportunity on several occasions to discuss the matter with the appropriate minister at the time. I was able to impress upon the minister the fact that more federal funding is provided to other institutions in Manitoba and other provinces at less funding levels than we experience here in Alberta. I think that's important, to make sure that members are aware of those discrepancies. Again, we continue to have those conversations with the federal government as we speak.

2:40 Teacher Misconduct and Bill 85

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The vast majority of teachers in Alberta are incredible educators and people, but as recent cases have highlighted, we know that there are circumstances when abuse or criminal behaviour happens in our classrooms. This is why I was so disappointed to hear that the NDP would call the students first act redundant and a distraction. In these rare cases of abuse or misconduct we need to do everything we can to ensure that these matters are dealt with transparently and in a way that puts students and their safety first. To the Minister of Education: how will the students first act improve student safety in the classroom?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The recently passed students first act is an important first step to improving student safety in the classrooms. It will do this by bringing Alberta in line with other jurisdictions and bringing the teaching profession in line with other professionals. An online database of the professional standings of teachers will give parents the information they need to give them more confidence sending their kids to school. This legislation will entrench the requirement for school authorities to conduct criminal record and vulnerable sector checks when employing a teacher or teacher leader and every five years thereafter. It will also speed up the teaching certificate removal process for those criminally convicted of indictable offences just like you mentioned.

The Speaker: The Member for Cardston-Siksika.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that we're hearing reports of a teacher who was charged with 17 sexual assault offences against six students between 1986 and 2006 and given that this individual admitted in 2006 that he mentally and physically abused his students, yet he was only given a two-year suspension of his teaching certificate by the Alberta Teachers' Association and no report was made to the police, to the minister: is there a requirement to report wrongdoing of child abuse to the police?

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like many Albertans, I've been very concerned about this case and even heartbroken to hear the specifics around it. It's just awful. I fully expect that in any instance involving criminal allegations of potentially criminal behaviour, the ATA and school authorities would bring that information before the proper authorities. As I said last week, I find it totally unacceptable that anyone or any organization would simply say: this is not my responsibility. It's everyone's responsibility when it comes to child abuse. Under the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act if a child is suspected to be at risk, it needs to be reported to the proper authorities.

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

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the NDP is heckling while these questions are being asked and given that the ATA denies that they had any obligation to report such an egregious case of teacher misconduct to the authorities and given that the ATA spokesperson said, and I quote, there would be concern that the professional conduct case could be in jeopardy if the association were to make complaints to other bodies and given that it is clear the union is more interested in protecting its members and their process rather than the well-being of our students, to the minister: what are the next steps to improve student safety and make sure cases like this never happen again?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for this very important question. I have always said that the students first act is the first step to improving this process. This important legislation will not only improve student safety, but it has started a broader conversation on how we can improve the teacher discipline process. Any time we can re-evaluate our processes to ensure that safety is enhanced and victims are supported, we need to do that. I am absolutely – absolutely – committed to further improving policies regarding student safety, and nothing – but nothing – is off the table when it comes to this. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. 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.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake has a statement to make.

Mental Health Supports

Mr. Rehn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today with a very heavy heart as I found out over the weekend that a constituent that I was lucky and proud to have met in 2018 passed away. While reflecting on this loss for our community, I also considered the personal circumstances many face across this province with this unusual year having created straining situations for folks all over Alberta.

Many willingly endure this strain on their mental health in silence, but their struggles deserve recognition, and they deserve our utmost support. From time to time it behooves this Assembly to remind ourselves of this very real and very human cost of this season, which it can impose, and the toll it takes on Albertans' mental health. But we combat despair with compassion, and we confront the bleak with optimism.

Through the recognition of these struggles we empower Albertans to have healthy and frank periods of introspection and conversation where they can find the help from others that they need and begin moving forward, because it is only through discussing and letting others know where we are in our life's journey that we can obtain the help we need to avoid these tragedies and they can become a less common story. Support is available to Albertans in tough moments, even those who endure silently, and I think it always bears repeating that those looking for help with their mental health in tough times can call the Alberta mental health helpline at 1.877.303.2642.

In today's circumstances I would like to remind everyone to please act with empathy and compassion toward their fellow beings regardless of nationality, social status, religious beliefs, vaccination status, or the personal circumstances someone deals with. Please keep in mind something my dear mother would often tell me: in this great world you can be anything that you would like, but remember to always be kind.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future I'm pleased to present on behalf of the committee its report on a presentation by the Tourism Industry Association of Alberta, November 18, 2021. I would like to thank the Tourism Industry Association of Alberta for taking the time to present to the committee. This report will be posted to the committee's public website shortly.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader, followed . . .

Mrs. Aheer: Sorry. I had a tabling.

The Speaker: We're not at tablings yet. It was Tabling Returns and Reports. We'll make sure we get to tablings.

The hon. Government House Leader, followed by the Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of Government Motion 115 in my name.

Be it resolved that:

- (1) A select special committee to examine "safe supply" be established and consist of the following members: MLA Nixon as chair, MLA Allard as deputy chair, MLA Amery, MLA Frey, MLA Feehan, MLA Goehring, MLA Milliken, MLA Rosin, MLA Sigurdson from Edmonton-Riverview, MLA Stephan, MLA Sweet, and MLA Yao;
- (2) The committee's mandate is limited to the consideration of the following matters:
 - (a) examining the concept of "safe supply," defined as a provision of pharmaceutical opioids, heroin, crystal methamphetamine, cocaine, or other substances to people who are addicted to or dependent on these substances;
 - (b) whether there is evidence that a proposed "safe supply" would have an impact on fatal or nonfatal overdose, drug diversion, or associate health and community impacts;
 - (c) whether there is evidence that a proposed "safe supply" would be accompanied by increased risk to

individuals, the community, other entities, or jurisdictions;

- (d) examining historical evidence regarding the overprescribing of opioids;
- (e) whether there is evidence that a proposed “safe supply” would be accompanied by any other benefits or consequences.

Mr. Speaker, I also rise to give oral notice of Government Motion 116, also in my name.

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Government Motion 115 is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further considerations of the motion, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the motion shall be put forthwith.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West has a notice of motion.

2:50

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give notice at the appropriate time under Standing Order 42 that I intend to move the following motion:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to

- (a) acknowledge the negative impact that continuous fights with doctors, concerted campaigns to discredit health care professionals, and attempts to cut wages for front-line health care workers have had on the retention and recruitment of Alberta health care workers;
- (b) condemn unfounded and dangerous rhetoric from the MLA for Peace River when it comes to Alberta Health Services enforcing a needed COVID-19 vaccine mandate for front-line health care workers;
- (c) publicly release the total number of surgeries that have been cancelled or delayed during each wave of the COVID-19 pandemic and release projections on how long it will take to reschedule and conduct all of these vital procedures;
- (d) publicly release a weekly reporting update for Albertans on progress to overcome the surgery backlog and any new procedure cancellations;
- (e) develop and release publicly a comprehensive plan to recruit front-line health care professionals to Alberta;
- (f) acknowledge the crisis in Lethbridge, where in the region more than 40,000 residents have no access to a primary care physician, and release a specific plan to recruit physicians to the community;
- (g) confirm all delegations of authority made under Order in Council 313/2021, acting ministers, during the period of the December and January 2021-22 holiday season with the intent of establishing a clear chain of command in Executive Council for the holiday season, especially while awaiting further data and study on the highly contagious omicron COVID-19 variant;
- (h) establish an independent Alberta COVID-19 advisory science table to provide advice on necessary public health measures during the ongoing pandemic; and
- (i) develop and publicly release a clear advocacy campaign to the federal government to follow through on its commitment to invest \$6 billion to, quote, support the elimination of health system wait-lists.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I understand the hon. Government House Leader may have made an error in the oral notice that he just provided. What I'm going to ask him to do is again provide oral notice for the entirety of the motion, not just what you missed, unfortunately.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Yeah. For sure, Mr. Speaker, on 115. I think 116 is fine. I'll go back to that. It is in my name as follows:

Be it resolved that:

- (1) A select special committee to examine “safe supply” be established and consist of the following members: MLA Nixon as chair, MLA Allard as deputy chair, MLA Amery, MLA Frey, MLA Feehan, MLA Goehring, MLA Milliken, MLA Rosin, MLA Sigurdson from Edmonton-Riverview, MLA Stephan, MLA Sweet, and MLA Yao;
- (2) The committee's mandate is limited to the consideration of the following matters:
 - (a) examine the concept of “safe supply,” defined as the provision of pharmaceutical opioids, heroin, crystal methamphetamine, cocaine, or other substances to people who are addicted to or dependent on these substances;
 - (b) whether there is evidence that a proposed “safe supply” would have an impact on fatal or nonfatal overdose, drug diversion, or associated health and community impacts;
 - (c) whether there is evidence that a proposed “safe supply” would be accompanied by increased risk to the individuals, the community, other entities or jurisdictions;
 - (d) examine historical evidence regarding the overprescribing of opioids; and
 - (e) whether there is evidence that a proposed “safe supply” would be accompanied by any other benefits or consequences;
- (3) During the course of its review the committee
 - (a) continue despite a prorogation of the session of the 30th Legislature, and
 - (b) may without leave of the Assembly meet during a period when the Assembly is prorogued;
- (4) The committee may, subject to the chair's approval, pay any reasonable costs necessary for the effective conduct of its responsibilities, specifically the costs of advertising, staff assistance, equipment and supplies, rent, travel, and other similar costs;
- (5) The committee may during the course of its review utilize the services of any of the following:
 - (a) Legislative Assembly Office employees or
 - (b) subject to the approval of the head of a department or an office of the Legislature, the public service employees of that department or office;
- (6) No later than April 30, 2022, the committee must submit a report to the Assembly that sets out its recommendations, if any;
- (7) If the Assembly is not sitting on the day that the committee completes its report, the chair of the committee must as soon as practical
 - (a) deposit the report with the Clerk in accordance with Standing Order 38.1 and
 - (b) provide a copy of the report to each Member of the Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker: If I can just confirm with the member that the date you provided notice for was April 30, 2022.

Mr. Jason Nixon: That is correct, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Excellent.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling an interim interpretation bulletin in which the Election Commissioner writes, "An interpretation of section 25 that would enable an individual to pay for an annual membership on behalf of others would be inconsistent with section 34."

I just wanted to say thank you to everyone who's worked really, really hard on this, and I'm looking forward to further interpretations.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of hon. Mr. Copping, Minister of Health, pursuant to the Health Disciplines Act the Health Disciplines Board 2020 annual report.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at points of order. The points of order of 1:56 and 2:01 have been withdrawn.

Motions under Standing Order 42

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West at the appropriate time rose and gave oral notice of her intention to move a Standing Order 42. The hon. member has up to five minutes to make the case on which the Assembly should put aside all other business to deal with the motion. Given that she just provided that motion verbally to members of the Assembly, it is up to her whether she chooses to use some of her five minutes to do that again, but I think the proximity of the notice to now – if she would like to get to the meat of the matter, she's welcome to as well.

Health System Capacity and COVID-19 Response

Ms Phillips:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to

- (a) acknowledge the negative impact that continuous fights with doctors, concerted campaigns to discredit health care professionals, and attempts to cut wages for front-line health care workers have had on the retention and recruitment of Alberta health care workers;
- (b) condemn unfounded and dangerous rhetoric from the MLA for Peace River when it comes to Alberta Health Services enforcing a needed COVID-19 vaccine mandate for front-line health care workers;
- (c) publicly release the total number of surgeries that have been cancelled or delayed during each wave of the COVID-19 pandemic and release projections on how long it will take to reschedule and conduct all of these vital procedures;
- (d) publicly release a weekly reporting update for Albertans on progress to overcome the surgery backlog and any new procedure cancellations;
- (e) develop and release publicly a comprehensive plan to recruit front-line health care professionals to Alberta;
- (f) acknowledge the crisis in Lethbridge, where in the region more than 40,000 residents have no access to a primary care physician, and release a specific plan to recruit physicians to the community;
- (g) confirm all delegations of authority made under Order in Council 313/2021, acting ministers, during the period of the December and January 2021-22 holiday season with the intent of establishing a clear chain of command in Executive Council for the holiday season, especially while awaiting further data and study on the highly contagious omicron COVID-19 variant;
- (h) establish an independent Alberta COVID-19 advisory science table to provide advice on necessary public health measures during the ongoing pandemic; and
- (i) develop and publicly release a clear advocacy campaign to the federal government to follow through on its commitment to invest

\$6 billion to, quote, support the elimination of health system waitlists.

Ms Phillips: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 42 to request that the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to debate a motion that is urgent and pressing and which I read out under Notices of Motions. I would like to acknowledge that pursuant to Standing Order 42 I provided the members of this Assembly with the appropriate number of copies and have provided your office with notice of my intention to move this motion as well as notified the government.

Mr. Speaker, this is not a matter that I rise to raise lightly. This is not a light request that I make on behalf of the NDP opposition or my constituents of Lethbridge-West, but in fact we are facing a crisis in the health care system, a crisis that we have seen has only worsened even over the weekend and since the Legislature last met last week. That is why this motion is both urgent and pressing.

Now, throughout the pandemic the UCP government has chosen a path of acting least and last and only reluctantly, after much suffering and unnecessary strife, following advice of experts, never in a timely fashion. While COVID-19 has obviously been a factor that has created this crisis and helped move it along, so too has the UCP government's ongoing war with doctors, nurses, and other front-line health care professionals. Currently, Mr. Speaker, there are 24 communities across Alberta where the hospital has closed beds or cut services because they don't have the staff to operate them safely. Most recently we saw this in the northern community of McLennan. Speaking to both urgency and timeliness, this is within the last few days. Now, we all recall that the former Minister of Health claimed earlier this year that the closures were because of summer holidays.

But, Mr. Speaker, the crisis isn't limited to hospital staffing. When Albertans call for an ambulance, they are facing longer and longer wait times. It is not to do with summer holidays that we now find ourselves in early December with closures of hospitals. Now we are seeing longer and longer wait times and huge gaps in coverage, which have pushed EMS crews and firefighters to the brink of exhaustion. Consolidated dispatch has caused new problems in Fort McMurray, Red Deer, Calgary, and Lethbridge.

Speaking of Lethbridge, Mr. Speaker, our third-largest city, there are now in the region more than 43,000 residents without a family doctor. This information has come to light over the weekend from the Chinook primary care network. That number is expected to grow in the coming weeks, and that is why the Chinook primary care network raised this figure and this alarming lack of primary care on an urgent basis with the Lethbridge city council last week.

Now, as for the pandemic, Mr. Speaker, we have now lost the lives of 3,258 fellow Albertans, tens of thousands of life-changing surgeries have been cancelled or postponed, and despite this we cannot even get a number for all Albertans so that we have a clear picture of how many outstanding surgeries there are. While our health care workers are pushed to the brink, there is heightened rhetoric providing an increasingly alarming context to vaccine hesitancy and outright vaccine science denial.

3:00

The Member for Peace River said that AHS had "held a knife to the throat, every day for 91 days, of many . . . remote communities." When he made that horrific claim last week, members of the government caucus applauded him. This causes a crisis from which we may never emerge if this is the kind of rhetoric that is going to dominate in this House, Mr. Speaker.

We deserve a government that will be honest with us on all of the points made in this motion. That is why I encourage the members

of this Assembly to provide unanimous consent to put aside the ordinary business of this House in order to debate this vital, urgent, and necessary motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First off, let me assure Albertans, through you, that the Health minister and the Health department and the government are responding to the new variant with an abundance of caution but also without undue alarm. The minister will have more to say in the coming days, of course, including here inside the Chamber in question period. The minister would also like to make clear that we've supported the federal government in temporarily restricting travel from countries where the new variant is circulating, and these measures can slow the spread to give us time to adjust our policies if needed. Alberta Health and AHS are conducting full case investigations for all international travellers, including contact tracing and testing. We're also testing every COVID case for the new variant, and we're maintaining our current measures when it comes to COVID-19.

Now, Mr. Speaker, with that in mind, it also turns us to the matter that the member of the Official Opposition has brought here today in another blatant attempt to derail the private members' business of this Chamber, and I, for one, will not as a member of this Chamber be giving consent to that. I suspect I will not be the only one. One has to ask . . . [interjections] I do hear the Member for Lethbridge-West heckling during Standing Order 42, right after she got up and discussed decorum and the way that members act in this place, which was quite rich coming from one of the most partisan members of the Official Opposition, who very rarely has anything nice to say about anybody.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, last week alone there were nine questions on COVID inside this Chamber on the new variant, just on the new variant. There's been ample opportunity inside this Chamber to discuss the new variant. There will be again every sitting day, I suspect, if that is what the Official Opposition thinks is the priority in their role of asking the government questions. There has also been a COVID-19 debate that has been held inside this Chamber with the Premier and the Health minister and other relevant ministers. It was a robust debate with lots of questions asked, and there are opportunities throughout our legislative process to continue to ask those important questions.

But why would the NDP want to ask for the consent of every member of this Chamber today to derail and to stop all of the private members' business that's before this House? Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the motions that's before this Chamber this afternoon from the MLA for Drayton Valley-Devon is as follows:

Be it resolved that the Assembly urge the government to consider taking the necessary steps to develop an incentive framework designed to assist in supporting the profitability of small and medium-sized oil and gas companies in Alberta while maintaining provincial and federal environmental standards.

That's just one of the things that would not be debated in this Chamber before the Chamber would leave before Christmas. You have to ask yourself if that is really what the NDP is focused on. They only seem to bring these Standing Order 42s, that they know they won't get consent for from all members of the Chamber, on days when there are oil and gas motions before the Chamber.

The other thing that this would do is it would derail the important piece of legislation coming from the MLA for Red Deer-South, Bill 209, the Cost of Public Services Transparency Act, Mr. Speaker, another important piece of legislation that deserves time inside this Chamber.

The new variant, of course, should be asked about. It will continue to be asked about. I encourage all members to use the opportunities that are before the House, our standing committee process, and other avenues within the legislative process to ask those important questions, but, Mr. Speaker, I strongly urge all members of the House not to fall for the NDP's trap of trying to block important motions about fiscal responsibility and defending the oil and gas industry and of trying to do everything they can to avoid those conversations in this Chamber, because they're trying to hide their sorely inadequate record when it comes to defending the oil and gas industry. In fact, what they're trying to hide is the fact that they're really trying to shut down the oil and gas industry in this province. They don't want to hear about the great things that are happening in Alberta.

I, for one, urge all members – I won't be giving consent anyway, Mr. Speaker, so it will only take one member not to. I will make sure that all private members inside this Chamber have an opportunity to be able to debate their important legislation. It will not be derailed by the NDP.

[Unanimous consent denied]

Orders of the Day

Motions for Returns

Chief Medical Officer of Health and Minister of Health Correspondence

M16. Mr. Dang moved on behalf of Mr. Shepherd that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all correspondence and briefing materials provided by the office of the chief medical officer of health to the office of the Minister of Health between July 1, 2021, and August 31, 2021.

[Debate adjourned November 29]

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others wishing to provide comment? The Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity here this afternoon to provide some more comments around Motion for a Return 16, rather fitting after that little I almost want to say tirade by the Government House Leader on what they're doing. Of course, Motion for a Return 16 is asking about the "copies of all correspondence and briefing materials provided by the office of the chief medical officer of health to the office of the Minister of Health between July 1 . . . and August 31, 2021."

You know, Mr. Speaker, I have never seen a government tie itself up in such pretzels and trying to perform gymnastic maneuvers so as not to be transparent and provide Albertans with the information that they so desire. The number of phone calls, the number of e-mails, the number of e-mails I've been copied on to every other office – as I said, even walking in the grocery store people are asking: "What happened during that time? What information came forward to be able to make decisions like the best summer ever?" It turned out that it became the worst fall ever because of those decisions. We even went as far as having to FOIP calendars because we heard the rhetoric over and over: I was on the phone every day; I was getting briefed every day. That's what I continually heard from the Premier and ministers about this time, yet nothing was in there.

Mr. Speaker, it's really funny, because I remember this from the 29th Legislature, that members of the government benches and members of the government caucus who served during that time

used to, quite to their delight I must say, berate the NDP government about this voice mode. Wow. How the tables have turned. Unbelievable.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

You know, if there was somebody actually in charge during that time – and I don't care whether it was handed over to somebody or not. The signs began to show themselves. I mean, Madam Speaker, you might as well have been standing on a train track looking straight down, and there's this horn and three bright lights coming at you, yet the decision was made: "Well, that can't be a train. It's probably just a mirage or something. We're on our best summer ever." Things are awesome right until awesome drove off the cliff in a spectacular crash. The problem is that it's not spectacular because at the end of the day it ended up costing hundreds of Albertans' lives. It's affected their family, their friends.

I'm not berating the Premier because he wanted to take some time off. Everybody has to. If you burn yourself out, you're no good to anybody. I want to know why the reins weren't handed over so that somebody could be pointed to and said: yeah, they're the ones in charge; they're the ones able to make some decisions or at the very least hit the big red button and set off the alarm, something. We got nothing during that time.

3:10

When asking further about why the government didn't ask for help, the answer we got was: well, there was an election going on. Come on. Everybody knows that the government doesn't stop because an election is on, especially from a minister who has been around for a little while and knows better. I'm sorry, Madam Speaker. That excuse just doesn't cut it. Something could have been done sooner, yet all we got this whole time: well, the NDP just doesn't like the best summer ever; they just want to lock up Albertans, and they just want to – insert whatever you want to put in there. One of the most ridiculous things I ever heard.

Madam Speaker, we need to know what was going on between those dates. We need to know how those decisions were being made. I get it. If that's the information you had and that's what you made, so be it. But at least Albertans will know. They deserve to know how we got to those decisions. What made us wait so long before raising the alarm? I'm hoping that the Assembly will grant this Motion for a Return 16 so that Albertans can finally get their questions answered. It can't be just me. I can't be the only MLA in this province getting phone calls: how did they make their decisions? Getting e-mails: how did they make their decisions? Getting stopped in the grocery store: how are they making their decisions; what are they basing it on? Facebook messages, Twitter messages: I can't be the only one.

I'm not saying that Albertans are going to necessarily even like the information. I've been more than willing to be up front with Albertans with stuff. I've said: "I'll tell you the truth. I can't guarantee you'll like it all the time, but at least you'll know I'm not hiding anything." For a government with a reputation – I think it's even expanding outside of Canada now, quite honestly – as the most secretive government: come on. We can do better than that, Madam Speaker. Just provide the information, and let Albertans know. Quite frankly, it's staggering.

You know, again, having served in the 29th Legislature and the amount of berating that the former NDP government got because they apparently don't share information and things like that, I always said that if you're going to sit here and criticize, when you get the chance to do it differently, you'd better step up to the plate. Here's your chance. Motion for a Return 16: provide the information between July 1 and August 31, 2021, between the chief medical

officer of health and the Minister of Health, that informed you to make the decisions like the best summer ever that cost Albertans their lives. Then, like I said, at the very least Albertans will finally have an answer. They may not like it, but at least they'll have the answers and so will this Assembly. Then perhaps, maybe what the Member for Lethbridge-West is bringing forward a motion to try to talk about: how do we move forward so we never ever repeat such a dramatic and costly mistake again?

I know that it's so hard for private members of this House to get their legislation heard. I get it. But to sit here and talk about how the NDP is just trying to block all of that – let's talk about the gymnastics and the huge list of private members' bills that are waiting to be discussed and keep getting blocked.

I hope the Assembly will take this into consideration.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure also to rise to speak to this Motion 16, where we are certainly requesting that an order of the Assembly issue for the "copies of all correspondence and briefing materials provided by the office of the chief medical officer of health to the office of the Minister of Health between July 1, 2021, and August 31, 2021."

Of course, this is a pretty key time in Alberta. This is a time when we know that COVID cases skyrocketed in our province, and there was some significant concern, certainly, that the restrictions that had been lifted earlier in the summer, because that was creating the best summer ever – that was certainly a big media campaign that the Premier and the UCP government did to say: you know, Alberta can now just about go back to normal and have the best summer ever. But, certainly, very tragically, that indeed was not possible, and people became sick at a very high rate because of a lessening of the restrictions.

I mean, I think it's always important to understand what really happened. Like, what happened? Whenever decisions are made, you know, whether it's in politics, whether it's in other kinds of work, in your household, anywhere, sometimes a decision gets made that's perhaps not the right decision. Why isn't it the right decision? So you go back and you look. You look at, like, what happened, and you can kind of deconstruct it to make sense of it. That's really what we want to do here because we don't want to continue to make mistakes, the same that caused tremendous suffering in our province. I mean, I think it's very important for us to really be able to understand what happened and, hopefully, not repeat those mistakes. That's why this is so important for the Assembly to order.

I guess another quite significant thing here is that we do know some information, not specifically about the Minister of Health but the Premier, because we did – certainly, the Official Opposition did FOIP some of the agenda of the Premier to see where he was. What was he doing during this time when the cases were skyrocketing and Alberta sort of remained open for the best summer ever branding that the UCP gave it? We found that certainly with the Premier there were no e-mails between the chief medical officer of health and the Premier's office. You know, the Premier certainly has been asked that question many times in this House during question period: why wasn't that documented? How come? He's assured the House repeatedly: oh, I was in constant contact all the time. And he said that, too, about the Minister of Health.

I mean, the Premier certainly isn't, you know, a new politician. One could actually call him a career politician. I think he was in his 20s when he was first elected, and of course he's had a long career in federal politics. He was an MP. He was often seen as, when the

Prime Minister was a Conservative, under Harper, one of his right-hand guys. I mean, the Premier has an extensive career and understanding of politics and, certainly in opposition, I would say, has spoken very clearly about the importance of accountability and transparency.

3:20

But it's unfortunate that now that he's in this role here, as the Premier of our province, that seems to have gone out the window. We repeatedly have him dismiss legitimate concerns and legitimate questions about accountability and transparency. Gosh, I've been meaning to compile a list of sort of all of those transgressions, all those ways that this Premier and this UCP government have actually been quite disrespectful to Albertans and, you know, just sort of suggested to everyone: hey, we're in charge, and we've got it covered, and we're doing lots of good stuff. But there are no checks and balances, there is no recording of phone calls, there's no correspondence that he can refer to. I mean, this is just something that should be de rigueur. This is something that any politician should do, that there is a paper trail, that you can go back and look at what actually was done, what meetings were held. So it sort of shocks me that the Premier doesn't quite understand this and seems to dismiss our concerns and dismiss, frankly, the concerns of many, many Albertans regarding what happened.

Of course, the consequences of what happened were devastating. We know that Albertans died in record numbers because of COVID-19. Our questions are valid questions, and I think this motion would help us gather the good information, again, as is important, so that we do look at that, make understanding of that, and are able to move forward to, for sure, make better decisions, because certainly when lives are lost, you know, that's a serious thing, and we must do what we can to be accountable and transparent. I think that those are two fundamental aspects of the reason that we want to have this information.

I have no doubt that every member of the UCP sees the value in that because I know that that's something that I've heard many of them say. Certainly, when we were government, it was something that they said very, very loudly. I don't hear it so much these days, when they're in government, but certainly it was something that they did espouse, and it is kind of part of the conservative movement, to be very concerned about accountability and transparency and making sure that things are okay. I mean, I think that everybody should agree with this, of course, because that would give us the information that we need. But, sadly, as I've pointed out, there are so many decisions, so many things that the UCP has done during their mandate, that is relatively short here, but, gosh, the devastation that's occurred throughout is – I mean, I've been wanting to compile a long list of all the things that are concerning.

Of course, I am the critic for Seniors and Housing and previously was the minister, so one of the greatest sort of travesties in lack of accountability, I think, and transparency is certainly the appointment of Janice Harrington as Alberta's Health Advocate. They closed the office completely the first year they were elected, the Seniors Advocate, and said: "Oh, no, no, no. We don't need that role. We don't need an advocate for seniors' issues. We'll just lump it all in to the Health Advocate." The Health Advocate position became available, and there was a legitimate human resources approach to selecting the new advocate, but guess what? The Minister of Health reached into that process, stopped it, and appointed a UCP leader, the CEO of the party, Janice Harrington, and she was magically the advocate. So there's no transparency, there's no accountability.

What's her background in health? What's her background in seniors? Her background was in party politics. I mean, you know,

that just smacks of – what's the word, you guys? Remember the word for that? Nepotism – there we go; I found it – and obviously a lack of accountability. They're putting someone in the position that doesn't really have the creds, the qualifications at all. I mean, that's a huge thing. So it's difficult for me when something so blatant like this is done, just with such boldness and glee and a lack of . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to join in on the debate?

[Motion for a Return 16 lost]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

COVID-19 Federal Assistance for Alberta

M17. Mr. Schmidt moved on behalf of Mr. Shepherd that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all correspondence, briefing materials, and other records held by Executive Council, the Ministry of Health, or the Ministry of Municipal Affairs related to contact with federal officials regarding COVID-19 pandemic related federal assistance for Alberta between August 1, 2021, and September 30, 2021.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to rise and move the motion for a return on behalf of my friend from Edmonton-City Centre.

I think it's important to just refresh all of my colleagues' memories on what was going on with respect to the mismanagement of COVID here in the province of Alberta and its relationship or lack thereof with the federal government. Now, on August 5, 2021, the then federal Health minister, Patty Hajdu, warned this government about lifting restrictions because, like many Albertans, the federal government was worried about the best summer ever plan. They thought at the time that – they were worried that cases would skyrocket, that ICUs would be overwhelmed, that surgeries would be cancelled, yet the following day the Premier said that he wasn't going to take lectures from Ottawa on how to manage COVID.

But it wasn't a lecture, Madam Speaker; it was a warning. The Premier was proved wrong, and the results were deadly. I think it bears repeating that because of this government's opening of the province of Alberta, the lifting all COVID-19 public health measures, more than 800 people have died of COVID and more than 80,000 people have gotten sick from COVID.

I think it bears repeating, Madam Speaker, that if you simply survived COVID, that doesn't necessarily mean that things are going well for you. As I've said in previous comments around this issue, I believe it was a recently released report by the University of Pennsylvania school of medicine that suggested that more than half of people who contract COVID, if they survive, are likely to suffer long-COVID symptoms, and those include things like permanent brain damage, permanent lung damage, permanent kidney damage, chronic fatigue. These are significant, debilitating symptoms that severely impact the health and well-being of people who could contract COVID. This Premier opened up the province to the unmitigated spread of COVID-19 and is directly responsible for tens of thousands of people getting sick.

3:30

As the fourth wave continued to increase, our ICUs started to buckle under the stress. It became quite clear quite quickly that things were getting out of control and that the province no longer had the resources it needed to be able to deal with the issue. In the time frame that we're considering here during this motion, the

public outcry to get COVID under control shifted to demanding that the province reach out to the federal government for help, and in turn Albertans were looking to the federal government to help us as well, but this government refused to ask for help until the absolute last minute.

Now, one of the excuses that the government has offered is that they couldn't possibly ask for help because there was an election ongoing, and they didn't know who to ask for help. Well, nobody believes that. We all know, the members opposite certainly know, the members of Executive Council certainly know that you don't stop being a cabinet minister or a member of Executive Council simply because an election has been called. We knew perfectly well who the Prime Minister was during the election. We knew perfectly well who the Prime Minister's cabinet was during the election. That was all clearly established in law and hadn't changed. A new cabinet isn't sworn in until after the election results have become clear and we know who the winner is, and until that time the Prime Minister and his cabinet continue on in their functions, to serve in their roles. It's the case in every election. This is something that we've been doing ever since the Westminster system has been created, Madam Speaker.

And I want to single out the Minister of Municipal Affairs here for making up this tired excuse, because he was the one who was publicly claiming he would have called on the federal government but that he just didn't know who to call. Apparently, he had no ability to figure out who the responsible minister was, which really should underline to the people of Alberta how badly he has failed to protect them from COVID-19. These excuses ring hollow.

We know that the minister knew who was in charge in the federal government and who to ask for help, and in fact we saw on September 21 this year that the Minister of Municipal Affairs finally officially requested help from the Public Safety minister, Bill Blair. Well, that was a day after the election results, Madam Speaker. Even if – even if – the federal Liberals had lost that election and some other government had won that election, on September 21 Bill Blair would have still been the minister of Public Safety and would have continued on in that role until a new cabinet had been sworn in. We had no time to waste. So this excuse that the minister keeps trotting out that he didn't know who the Public Safety minister was is not true.

Finally, we know that the feds confirmed help on October 2. Health care staff arrived on October 4 and were able to go back home on October 31. Let me just say thank you to all of those Canadians who responded to our call for help. I don't know how many lives they may have saved, but the people of Alberta are very grateful that in times of need like this we can rely on our fellow Canadians to come to our aid. I know that in the future, should our fellow Canadians request help from Alberta for any kind of emergency, we will be more than happy to provide that help as well, Madam Speaker. That is one of the benefits of being a member of Confederation, that we can continue to rely on and support one another in times of crisis.

What the minister and the government have said about being unable to contact the federal government during the election period is completely untrue, and we suspect that there were discussions ongoing during the election period even though their public statements contradicted that. So we want to know what the truth is, and that's why we've made this motion for a return. We want to see the records. Albertans deserve to see the records.

You know, the Premier and the Minister of Health at the time continued to maintain this, to me, unbelievable story that they were working flat out to manage the pandemic, yet they can't provide one shred of evidence that that's true.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members to join the debate? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak to this motion for a return. I mean, the most important reason why we have put these motions for returns before the House is on behalf of the people of Alberta, who deserve answers about how everything was handled between August 1 and September 30, 2021, not only because of the crisis created in the health care system, not only because of the overwhelmed intensive care system and the grave danger that this placed so many of us in, pretty well anyone who, you know, found themselves doing an outdoor activity and who might have needed emergency or urgent care, anyone who may have been in a motor vehicle accident, for example. Any of those folks in that time period would have found a health care system that was significantly constrained in responding to what they needed during that time.

That is the reason we ask for these documents but also because what happened between August 1 and September 30, Madam Speaker, had a grave effect on Alberta's reputation, our tourism numbers, our ability to host and plan conferences, our ability to have family visits and, you know, for people to be able to come from out of province to visit their grandchildren and otherwise.

The daily national headlines, Madam Speaker, also had another effect, and that is to say that being able to attract health care workers to this province was significantly undermined by the actions and inactions of this government and in particular the action of going on holidays, the action of not putting anyone in charge, and the inaction and the absolutely cavalier attitude that then resulted vis-à-vis Albertans' health, well-being, and the future of the province.

So that is why, given that we are part of a federation, Madam Speaker, given that we are a part of this national family – and, really, at that time thank goodness we were. The daily pressure of those national headlines, the arrival of the Canadian Forces – and thank goodness they were there for us – the arrival of health care professionals from out of province: that finally happened. But we need to know why that took so long and how long the conversation took, back and forth, with Executive Council, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, who have responsibility for emergency response and management. It's in terms of the contact with federal officials regarding the COVID-19 pandemic between August 1 and September 30, 2021.

3:40

Now, Madam Speaker, the fact of the matter is this. We need to have a full reckoning with what happened during the fourth wave. It is going to come regardless for this government. It will come in a few different forms if they do not want to share these documents. If they want to persist in taking a very structurally narrow approach to the concept of executive privilege, if they do not want to level with Albertans about what their record of action and inaction was during that time period, it will come out. It will.

It is not as if this fundamental failure of governance is going to somehow remain unknown to Albertans. It's going to come out through conversations that the hon. members have on the doorsteps of their constituents as they get told about the tremendous human suffering that happened during the fourth wave of the pandemic, as they hear about all of those cancelled and delayed surgeries. But it will also come out in various forms over the course of the next year, year and a half through freedom of information, through other sources.

The government may as well level with Albertans now, may as well take a broad view of the privilege of Executive Council documents and essentially share with Albertans and indeed

Canadians the burden that they put each individual Albertan under, whether they work in a health care facility or not, or the burden that they then shunted off to the national government in the form of having to co-ordinate emergency assistance and other emergency health care workers to come to Alberta or the assistance of the Canadian Forces. We may as well have that accounting now so that we know how to do better next time. When you know better, you do better. When one knows better, one does better, Madam Speaker. So it is for that reason that we have put this motion before the House.

You know, there are a number of unanswered questions that remain as well such as the timing between the Minister of Municipal Affairs' request for emergency help from the Public Safety minister, which was on September 21, extremely convenient timing, that being a significant delay, and, of course, confirming that help from the federal government some nine or 10 days later.

Now, the fact is that all of this story must be told because of not just the tremendous suffering that resulted as a result of the mismanagement of the fourth wave – and it was significant – but there is a tremendous economic cost as well, and we deserve to know if there was any analysis due to the inaction, if officials were being briefed as to the economic costs, the tourism costs, the interprovincial trade costs, or if the government, like with the health care decision-making, was just flying blind and blissfully unaware because they were busy being on vacation, Madam Speaker.

It is for those reasons, Madam Speaker, that we have put these questions to the House. It's important, too, that we understand what the government knew and when they knew it. As we saw at Public Accounts last week, AHS had been showing some leadership when it came to modelling and managing the pandemic. AHS had created an early warning system. They had triggers and thresholds identified, but during the second wave the province didn't listen, and we still don't know what happened, even in the fourth wave, with those projections, that modelling, and that early warning system. Again, when we have bits and pieces leaking around social media, the truth will come out at some point. The province may as well level with Albertans so that we can all move forward and use either what we know, what we've come to learn – hopefully, we do not have to manage another wave of the pandemic – for future emergency management and emergency response of various kinds. It is incumbent upon us to learn as much as we can now so that we can do better in the future and save lives.

I'm going to look to my colleagues. It's 3,258?

Ms Pancholi: That's right.

Ms Phillips: Three thousand two hundred and fifty-eight: that is a lot of human beings.

That is a lot of loss of life. I think we should take a moment to think about just how profound that loss of life is. The very least that the province can do – the very least – for those 3,258 people is to release as broad a spectrum of documents as possible so that we better understand what happened, whether it's in our long-term care facilities, whether it is in our hospitals, whether it is managing other outbreaks elsewhere, so that it never happens again.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to join the debate? Seeing the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to Motion for a Return 17 that has been moved by the Member for Edmonton-City Centre. The motion is as follows:

That an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all correspondence, briefing materials, and other

records held by Executive Council, the Ministry of Health, or the Ministry of Municipal Affairs related to contact with federal officials regarding COVID-19 pandemic related federal assistance for Alberta between August 1, 2021, and September 30, 2021.

This government has been very clear on the support we requested from the federal government in the midst of the fourth wave as growing case numbers put a strain on our health care system. As was first publicly shared on September 21, Municipal Affairs Minister Ric McIver, Madam Secretary – Madam Chair. I was just in Santa Fe. He formally requested aid from the federal government in a letter addressed to the Public Safety minister there. He asked the federal government to provide their own medical evacuation capability to relocate patients out of Alberta and ICU registered nurses and respiratory therapists to assist in Alberta's critical care response.

During a September 30 media briefing on the COVID-19 pandemic the Premier announced that we would be receiving federal support. Despite this proactive request, patients were never transferred out of the province or out of the country. To the contrary, Alberta has actually accepted patients from the rest of the country. Since March 2021 Alberta has accepted a total of 440 COVID and non-COVID patients from other provinces. This included 35 ICU COVID patients and 99 non-ICU COVID patients.

Just like Ontario, Quebec, and all western Canadian provinces, Alberta received military assistance to respond to COVID-19. The assistance to our province came in the form of one senior critical care nurse and eight critical care nursing officers. Military support was in place from October 4 to October 21. When the nurses arrived in early October, Alberta Health Services provided photos and footage of them working at the Royal Alex hospital ICU in Edmonton and provided the media access to connect with them as well. We also received seven critical care personnel from Newfoundland and Labrador, who helped increase the capacity in Fort McMurray, as well as 17 ICU nurses from the Canadian Red Cross, who supported the COVID-19 response across the province.

I know that I and our entire province remain extremely grateful to these skilled medical professionals, who left their friends and family to come and help provide expert care to hospitalized Albertans when we needed them most, and to all first-line health care responders across all of our province for their ongoing efforts throughout the pandemic and the incredible strain that they have felt over that time period.

None of these requests or offers of support were hidden from the members opposite or the people of Alberta. We have shared this information publicly and have publicly recognized each organization that provided or offered support to our province in the fourth wave. Given the extensive disclosure of this topic, this request is a bit puzzling, especially given the continued pressure on the Ministry of Health as they work to continue to manage the COVID-19 pandemic, and in light of that, this request seems even more unreasonable. I'm sure that even the members opposite would agree that the minister's time and the ministry's time could be much better spent working on Alberta's pandemic response than in entertaining this redundant request.

3:50

The reason we're against this motion for a return is that the information is already so readily and easily accessible through the interactive health data application website. The broad scope of this request also raises the risk of highly sensitive confidential information being publicly disclosed. This could include documents subject to cabinet confidentiality and government-to-government confidentiality.

I would strongly urge all members of this Assembly to vote against this because it would be an improper use of the government's time and resources. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to join in on the debate? Would the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar like to close this out?

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Just before I get started, can I have a reminder? How much time do I have? Five minutes. Thank you very much.

Well, you know, in my most disappointed dad voice, I guess, I am disappointed but not surprised by the Member for Lethbridge-East again carrying water for the most unpopular government in the country and one of the most unpopular Premiers in the history of this province. He did it with respect to my friend from Edmonton-Manning's motion regarding protecting the Rocky Mountains from coal mining. He's doing it here, defending this government against requests for transparency and accountability. I strongly suspect, Madam Speaker, that at some point in the future the Member for Lethbridge-East will look back on his time here in the Legislature and deeply regret the efforts that he made in defending this government's actions in a whole host of areas of public policy, not least of which is COVID-19. Or maybe he won't.

You know, I remember quite clearly the Member for Lethbridge-East telling the media – I think it was CTV News in an interview – that his plan for protecting Albertans from COVID was to just let COVID rip through the population as fast as possible, make as many people sick as fast as possible, and get this behind us, no worries about the consequences of how many people would get sick or die. That was his plan for managing COVID, Madam Speaker, so it should come as no surprise that he's the one defending this government's decision to avoid accountability by complying with this request.

Now, if I can summarize the member's arguments for voting against this motion, I think they would be: "Just trust us. We were on the job. We've been completely transparent with the people of Alberta about what we were doing and what we weren't doing with respect to managing COVID and our communications with the federal government. All of the things that we said that were true are actually true. Don't ask any more questions. We won't provide any more evidence. Let's just move along here and try to deal with something else."

The people of Alberta are not buying it, Madam Speaker. The people of Alberta know that this government failed to act appropriately to protect people from infection and death when it comes to the spread of COVID-19, and they want answers. They want to know what the government was doing to make sure that the proper federal supports were in place to counteract this government's failure to protect people from the spread of COVID-19 in the first place.

Why should the people of Alberta believe it? For months we were told that the Premier and the Minister of Health were on the job every day from the beginning of August until the end of August, when we knew that the Premier was on holidays. Well, it turns out that none of that was true either. The Premier was on holidays in some undisclosed location. I surmise that the Premier probably had an undersea bunker that he was vacationing in, you know, the kind with chairs that spin around, stroking a white cat, looking at the COVID numbers going up every day, and hoping that some plucky, young British spy doesn't foil his plans.

Not only was the Premier in an undisclosed location, but we found out that the Minister of Health was also on holiday. The person who was actually in charge was the Minister of Education,

but we had to go through FOIP to find that out, Madam Speaker. So why should we believe the government on anything that it tells the people of Alberta with respect to its mismanagement of the COVID-19 file? I think the government has an opportunity here to come clean with the people of Alberta, tell us all exactly what was going on, and they can take the first step by voting for this motion.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has moved on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre Motion for a Return 17.

[Motion for a Return 17 lost]

Alberta Health Services and Minister of Health Correspondence

M18. Ms Renaud moved on behalf of Mr. Shepherd that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all correspondence, briefing materials, and other records provided by Alberta Health Services to the office of the Minister of Health between July 1, 2021, and September 30, 2021.

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

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Motion for a Return 18 as moved by my colleague the Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

The Deputy Speaker: Sorry, hon. member. Just note that you will be moving this on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre. Thanks.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm happy to move this motion.

Well, Madam Speaker, you know, I went back and had a look on the dashboard just to see for this particular period of time, to remind me how horrific things were getting over that period of time. At that point, on July 1, 2021, already 2,301 Albertans had died because of COVID, because of the waves that had come before. A lot of this, obviously, was before Albertans had access to vaccines, so things were quite a bit different. I'll tell you the number of people that had died by September 30, 2021: 2,697. That is just shy of 400 people, so that's 396 Albertans who died between July 1, 2021, and September 30, 2021.

What we're asking for here, in a nutshell, is some transparency. We have tried a number of different ways, Madam Speaker. We have asked questions in this Chamber. We have asked questions to different ministries via e-mail. We have asked questions in Public Accounts meetings. We have asked officials questions. We have asked ministers questions. All we get is spin. We don't get solid answers. We get: "It was this person's fault. NDP bad. Why do you hate oil and gas?" We don't get answers about the questions that we're asking, and those are about the correspondence within government. How did this happen? How was this allowed to happen?

Now, I think that if any members across the way, who will undoubtedly vote against this because it is their track record to be as opposite of transparent as possible – they will hide information. They will point in other directions to try to divert your attention somewhere else. They refuse to be honest and share information about what happened, why it happened, and what they learned from that when it did happen, Madam Speaker.

Now, I would suggest that if anything else happened – let's say that it wasn't COVID; it was some other accident. God forbid it was a train accident or an airplane accident or a highway accident or

something like that. If this many Albertans had died in such a short period of time, there would be an outcry, and I would hope that government would be tripping over themselves to share information to show: this is what happened; you know, this didn't go great, but here is what we learned from it so that we never repeat this again, that we never allow this kind of tragedy to happen again.

Madam Speaker, what is so incredibly disappointing about this government – there is a lot to be disappointed about. I could go on for days about the corruption that we see, the corrupt decisions, the inability or the unwillingness to share information, to be transparent, the unwillingness to be accountable to the people of Alberta. But again and again and again they just refuse to let Albertans know what happened so that we, all of us, all Albertans, can decide for ourselves.

4:00

But even more disturbing than that is that this government seems unwilling or incapable of learning from their mistakes to prevent this from ever happening again. We saw it just last week. I hope to goodness that this is not what happens, but I think it was even the day that we started hearing about another variant, one that we know very little about, so it's incumbent on all of us to just wait, wait until we know more. Is it more transmissible? Does it interact differently with our vaccine? Where is it? What's the spread like? We don't know those things yet, Madam Speaker, so we need to wait and find out. But at that very time that we were learning that there was another variant that was causing trouble in other countries, we have a Premier going on television musing out loud about lifting restrictions at Christmastime without information, once again a solid example of what this government does. Without accurate information, without current information they're just willing to do whatever.

So what have they learned from this deadly period between July 1 and September 30, 2021, where almost 400 Albertans died because this government was so busy tripping over themselves to open for summer? It's just shocking to me that this government is being propped up by all of these backbenchers and private members that are unwilling to step up and say: "You know what? We're going to separate ourselves from the decision-makers who are not letting us produce this information. We're going to show a little bit of courage, and we're going to say: yes, let's see the information. Put it out there. Let Albertans decide." You know, if indeed the Premier was briefed and he had current information and this was the best decision, to open for summer and just to get rid of the public health orders that were actually doing a good job of maintaining or keeping the transmissions down, if that's the case, then fine. But we will never know that because this is a government unwilling to be honest with Albertans.

We saw again and again, wave after wave after wave after wave, just dismal failure. Now we are doing our job as the Official Opposition, and we are asking for information. Once again we are being told by this government just: no; you can ask questions all you like, but you're just not getting the answers. All we get, all Albertans get from this government is spin. Not surprisingly, listening today in question period, Madam Speaker, it's very much like the answers that we get to these questions. We'll ask a question. We'll immediately get: I reject the premise of that question; that's incorrect. That is because this is a government unwilling, unable, and incapable of answering questions.

I think that it's so funny that before the election we heard time and again the now Premier talking about humility, you know: we're going to work hard for the Alberta people. Well, you're not doing it. You're failing miserably. You are failing miserably. You will find out soon what that means. You can laugh all you like. Madam

Speaker, you've got members over here laughing because I'm talking about humility, that this government does not have. But there will be consequences to this. It is impossible to allow this many people to die. This was preventable. This fourth wave was preventable. These hundreds of people did not have to die, but this government chose to be reckless and to lift public health orders before it was time, before it was safe, and we want to see what happened behind the scenes. Albertans have a right. They have a right to know. They have a right to see the correspondence and the briefing materials between Alberta Health Services and the Ministry of Health.

I, too, was at the Public Accounts meeting. I did see the documents. I've seen the FOIP information. We've asked questions. We get a lot of stalling from the Ministry of Health, but I did see the FOIP documents. We saw that there were mechanisms in place to assist the government to know when we were in a danger zone, and we saw this government blow through all of those danger zones without even stopping because they were too focused on being open for summer for whatever reason. In the interim all of these people died.

Madam Speaker, I'm incredibly disappointed that this government, these members, are just shaking their heads. It's almost like they believe that the people of Alberta have no right to access this information. They have every right – they have every right – to know what happened and why. This government, one way or the other, will be accountable to the people of Alberta for the people that died needlessly because this government chose to do their own things over what I believe was hard science and advice from AHS. I mean, we see it all the time, whether it's ridiculous members' statements trying to accuse AHS of holding knives to people's necks. I mean, just the ridiculousness is – it's a bit stunning, actually.

Albertans deserve to see the records. They deserve the truth. They deserve honesty. They deserve to understand. I would hope that – I don't imagine that this government is going to support this. They just haven't. They have been the least transparent. They are the least trusted, most secretive government in this country, so I would be shocked if they supported it, but Albertans will eventually find out. I think one of my colleagues said earlier: eventually the truth comes out. You bet it will come out. Maybe it's after you all lose your election and you're looking for work somewhere else that you finally think to yourself: "You know what? I should have had the courage to stand up."

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, I'll take this opportunity to remind all members to direct your comments through the chair at all times.

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

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Motion for a Return 18. As mentioned by my colleagues and moved by the Member for St. Albert on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-City Centre, this motion is seeking "copies of all correspondence, briefing materials, and other records provided by Alberta Health Services to the office of the Minister of Health between July 1, 2021, and September 30, 2021."

Madam Speaker, I just want to pick up on a couple of comments that my colleague the Member for St. Albert said. I found it very striking how she noted that within the time period of this motion for a return, these few months over the summer, critical months, as it turns out, for Albertans and our health care system and our economy, 400 Albertans died in that period of time. It's also important to note that as a result of the actions taken and not taken during that time, an additional 500 Albertans since then have died. We are now sitting at over 3,200 Albertans that have died from COVID.

It is on the record. It is clearly established that Alberta moved recklessly to reopen too fast. Even the Premier, as much as he fails to take responsibility, somewhat acknowledged some accountability for the fact that he lifted the restrictions too soon. Not enough, Madam Speaker, because he won't actually answer any questions or produce any documents or do any of the transparency and accountability that's required. You know, we know that as a result of the lack of actions and the decisions taken by this government during this period of time, Albertans lost their lives.

I am also privileged to sit as a member of the Public Accounts Committee, and we know that in the previous year, in the second wave and in the third wave, Alberta Health Services was doing the work and getting information, was doing projections, was doing modelling even though they were directed not to do it by Alberta Health because they recognized the dire circumstances that Albertans were facing. They needed to be prepared for what was coming, to prepare with PPE and staffing and do all the things that the government end of things was refusing to do. We know that Alberta Health Services has been more aware of what's been happening and been trying to take mitigation measures and do the work. We need to know what happened during this period of time, because that hasn't been covered by Public Accounts. Albertans should not have to file a FOIP request to get basic information about decisions and information that was provided to this government that led to no action from this government.

It is remarkable that while we have been speaking on these very issues, it's like the UCP is already tired of talking about it, like they're just so tired of hearing from the opposition and from Albertans to be held accountable for what they did that cost Albertans their lives, that is still jeopardizing our health care system right now and will continue to for years to come, that has jeopardized our economy and small businesses and put workers out of work. I am so sorry that the UCP is tired of talking about it, but Albertans are still living it.

So we will stand up and use the tools that we have to demand some accountability and transparency from this government. We're seeing members in this Assembly laugh and guffaw and fail to even still wear a mask properly as if this is such an irritation to them, but there are Albertans who have lost their lives. We need to know. I'm sorry that they're tired of hearing about it, but we will continue to use all the tools at our disposal to try to get some answers.

4:10

All that we know from what took place is that the Premier and the Minister of Health went on vacation. The Minister of Education was apparently in charge of Health. But all of that aside, I know that the Premier and the Minister of Health claim that they were on the phone all the time. There's no proof of that. There are no records to show that. There's no FOIP request that has determined that there had been any meetings or phone calls or anything that happened. But even apart from all that, Madam Speaker, it doesn't matter what they claim they did, because Albertans saw what they did, which was nothing. There was silence from this cabinet. Every single member of this cabinet was silent during a critical time as our health care system was crashing and Albertans were dying. As a result of that silence, we are still paying the price.

Now UCP backbenchers are standing up and carrying water for this government. They're actually standing up and defending and giving – I can't wait to hear what we hear from the government members when they deny this motion for a return, because I know they will, and they will give their talking points. It is absolutely shocking. I never would have imagined during the crisis that has unfolded in this province that we would see a government so embarrassingly just degrade themselves to cover for each other

while their constituents got sick and died. I simply don't know how many of these members go to sleep at night.

I know this is just a motion for a return to try to make one more effort, Madam Speaker, to get a little bit of transparency from this government, and I urge the members on the opposite side to show some humility, show some accountability, show some transparency for once.

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

Ms Issik: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and speak to Motion for a Return 18, that's been moved by the Member for Edmonton-City Centre. The motion reads as follows:

That an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all correspondence, briefing materials, and other records provided by Alberta Health Services to the office of the Minister of Health between July 1, 2021, and September 30, 2021.

Since the pandemic began, Alberta Health has made communicating with Albertans a priority. We've done everything possible to get accurate, confirmed information to the public as soon as possible, even as things evolve very quickly, especially in the early weeks and early months of this public health crisis, and we've had a great partner in Alberta Health Services in making that possible. From day one the AHS president and CEO, Dr. Verna Yiu, and other AHS leaders have been providing vital information to Albertans, especially as it relates to testing, seeking treatment, and how COVID has impacted other health care processes, guidelines, and operations. Dr. Yiu and members of the AHS leadership team often participate in our regular in-person media briefings, especially when there are key updates about our health care system, like when pressure on the system increases, when there are important policy changes like mandating vaccinations for health care workers, or when the public has questions about particular topics.

In addition to these COVID-specific media briefings, AHS has strong, well-established reporting processes in place to provide the public with transparent information about its operations. The organization publishes regular annual reports and monitoring measures in areas including acute care, primary care, continuing care, and emergency department and surgery wait times. Throughout the pandemic we have included hospitalization due to COVID-19 stats as part of our regular media briefings and a comprehensive data set on alberta.ca, and our online reporting has included information on overall hospital capacity to help Albertans understand the pressure placed on our health system by COVID-19. At any moment Albertans can visit alberta.ca to see how many beds in acute care and ICU are currently occupied, how many are occupied by patients with COVID, and how many beds remain unoccupied.

AHS also recently published its new 2020-2022 health plan and 2021-2022 business plan. The AHS health plan and business plan is a public accountability document that describes at a strategic level the actions AHS will take in carrying out its legislative responsibilities to deliver quality health services. These plans were developed with guidance and direction from Alberta Health and align to the Ministry of Health's 2021-2024 business plan, the Blue Ribbon Panel on Alberta's Finances report, and the AHS performance review. Over the year AHS will focus on recovering to pre-COVID service levels, improving performance over and above pre-COVID levels, and addressing other emerging priorities. To maintain accountability and transparency to Albertans, AHS will produce a 2021-2022 annual report with performance details and results, reporting progress on its new health plan. There's no

question that Alberta Health Services and the Ministry of Health are committed partners in managing this public health crisis and continuing to care for the health and well-being of all Albertans.

We're against this motion for a return because the information is already so readily and easily accessible through the alberta.ca website and AHS's various reporting. Not only do AHS and Alberta Health provide comprehensive information to the public, but the provision of material related to this request would not be subject to the safeguards engaged when requests for information are made through the legislated freedom of information and protection of privacy process. As well, the broad scope of this request raises the risk of highly sensitive confidential information being publicly disclosed. This includes documents subject to cabinet confidentiality, confidential third-party business information, and personally identifying health information.

In addition to those reasons, this motion puts additional extremely time-consuming demands on those in AHS and in the Ministry of Health who are working tirelessly to manage the pandemic response and our health care system during this critical time. I believe members opposite would agree that the ministry's time as well as Alberta Health Services' time is much better spent protecting Albertans and our health system from COVID-19.

I strongly urge all members of this Assembly to vote against this to ensure our focus and resources are spent on caring for Albertans. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to join in on the debate?

Seeing none, would the hon. Member for St. Albert like to close?

[Motion for a Return 18 lost]

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

Bill 209 Cost of Public Services Transparency Act

[Debate adjourned April 19]

The Deputy Speaker: Any members wishing to join in the debate on Bill 209? The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Thanks, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise to private member's Bill 209, which is the Cost of Public Services Transparency Act. For those following along at home or potentially the 12 people that might watch this later tonight, getting a private member's bill – I've kind of said it before – is like getting the moose draw. But, you know, hearing some of the statistics out there, it's even worse than that. It's like winning a little lottery, like an all-expense-paid trip to – I don't know – somewhere outside of the Alberta borders, because we're really not allowed to travel too much but hoping to change some of that. The thing is that when a private member gets some of this, it's literally the Holy Grail. The chance to have an impact as a private member – we only get to talk about these things on Mondays. You know, everyone else might hate Mondays; we kind of like it as private members, the chance to pull something forward as a private member, to have it put in an act as legislation, to have a positive outcome. Hats off to the Member for Red Deer-South for bringing this forward.

This bill – he is a lawyer, but he dealt in tax quite a bit, so it's going to be pretty out there – is actually to deal with public transparency to find out what the cost of services are. All these services that take place behind the scene: the public really doesn't

know the cost impacts of them. What part of the bill is going to do is to help educate people to understand what the cost of services are.

Now, when we were in the Resource Stewardship Committee, we had length – I had length as well – to go back and forth on this. We had tons of stakeholders that came in on this, both on the private side of it – we had stakeholders from the public sector. We had internal governmental department folks, the ones that run the departments and also count where the shekels go, as it were. Now, we had a chance to ask a ton of questions. One of the biggest concerns that a lot of people brought forward is: "Well, are you adding more red tape?" or orange tape, as I like to call it. "Are you adding more, you know, nonsensical things and just printing paper for no reasons?" No, actually it isn't. "Well, are you going to have a ton of other costs implemented by trying to put in these control systems?" Well, no, actually we're not. You see, Madam Speaker, I know you're enthralled with this, too, because, you know, it's one of those hot topic items, but I know I've got your attention on this one.

What it's really doing is taking a ton of this data that's already there, the costs and all the cost controls that go into the whole system. It's already sitting there. The problem is: how do you get it out in a normalized fashion? Right now you kind of have to go down some goat road and some rabbit trail, and you kind of go back to this other place. Then maybe you get it and you can all do it, and we say that we've done our job as government because it's out there. Well, if you can navigate through some of the government websites or the departments, sure, you could kind of run your own spreadsheet off to the side, but what this does is that it puts it out there for the layman, the everyday person, the everyday Albertan that goes and uses services. If one of these departments has that information, then what they can do is pull up a little report that is already being attached to an existing piece of paper they provide you. Isn't that neat?

4:20

The other thing that came out of it – and I'm thinking this is neat because I'm kind of a cost-control geek myself – is that when you have that data, you can influence behaviours. People will understand that if I go – I don't know; let's say I've got a really good excuse – and I break my leg on the weekend and I end up in the hospital, well, now I'll find out how much me being a silly bugger who broke my leg actually costs or how much I've received in goods and services coming back, which is another astounding thing.

It also helps drive some of these groups themselves, the departments that run these, to have better access to information internally. A ton of their systems are antiquated. When you start asking them questions like, "Can you spit out a report in a certain manner of fashion," the answer is no. They can't, but they're upgrading to that anyway. What you're essentially doing is putting on a requirement for them to literally have a better control service, and when that service, that system itself, becomes operable and functional, well, then it's available to pull that report. It's able to pull that data.

[The Speaker in the chair]

As a private member to put something forward like this: it should save us a whack-load of cash by simply using internal systems that already exist but just disseminating that data in a different way. When we run projects, it's usually safety, quality, costs, schedule. That's kind of how it goes. Safety is always first. Quality, schedule, costs: it depends on what your motivation is. One of those elements is going to help drive the other effect. By pulling information and just looking at it, Mr. Speaker, you're going to, as a positive side effect, influence one of these areas, whether it's the quality of

service, whether it's the safety of the information, the data integrity itself, or the safety of the individuals, or it potentially could change behaviours, so folks understand really what the impact and the cost overall is.

How would this look? Well, it's providing costs through receipt, invoice, or transcript or tax assessment. Again, back to my point, Mr. Speaker, it's all the information that's already there; we just have another line item on it. Posting a written notice in a location or on a website that's accessible to the user and readily accessible: again, not having to be one of those – I don't know – smart kids like I have at home that can navigate through these websites and get there with, you know, three or four clicks. For me, I'm spending 25, 30 minutes, an hour, and I give up and I'm frustrated. With this, it also helps on that whole mindset of literally financial literacy, so understanding the cost benefits, understanding where all of this goes. Again, I can't exemplify that enough.

The paperwork burden is low. Again, it's talking about utilizing existing systems that already have it and trying to upgrade, quite frankly, as some of our systems are antiquated. I've heard stories from – and I shouldn't mean to giggle. The Minister of Service Alberta was telling us some stories internally where there were still dot matrix printers and fax machines harkening in the hallowed halls. I mean, there are not even support systems anymore for a bunch of this stuff. Giving a bunch of these groups this kind of mandate that's compelling them to literally get into the future or get into the present. It's not even going into the future.

Budget 2021 said that one of the fiscal anchors of our province is normalizing the per data cost of public services and the government to comparator provinces. Again, how can we measure our performance and our successes against other jurisdictions and how can we convey that message to the taxpayers of how we're literally spending their dollars to get the best bang for their buck if we don't have the systems or the reports to prove that? The inside-out efforts of this government become more sustainable and supportive from the outside in by the Cost of Public Services Transparency Act supporting increased transparency to Albertans, letting Albertans know how their tax dollars are being spent.

Again, we all want that. We want to know how our dollars are being spent. I mean, I found out a few things. The processing: some of the departments are just processing paper and information to let grants out. You'll spend 50 cents on every dollar of just processing the paperwork. To me, that's kind of a compelling argument to look at cost efficiencies. The taxpayers don't necessarily see that, but we have line of sight to some of the budgets. We have line of sight on some of the conversations to the ministers that run those. A 50-cent dollar. If I throw a dollar in the hopper and my change back is 50 cents but we've managed to spend 50 cents of the dollar rather than getting more impact back, especially to some not-for-profit organizations: taxpayers need to know that benefit, Mr. Speaker.

Increased transparency and knowledge engages the public as citizens of our province, supporting more sustainable and accountable government: absolutely, one hundred per cent. If you want to hold the government to account, if you want to hold services to account, you have to have something to measure them against. Again, this nebulous thing – I'm not saying that folks aren't doing best efforts now, but it's just very difficult. You have no line of sight. A rounding error on what the government spends here could be more than the person's lifetime income.

To the Member for Red Deer – Red Deer-South. I always mess that up; I can't get my directions right sometimes. Red Deer-South: I very much appreciate the work and effort you've done for this. I very much appreciate all stakeholders that you engaged and brought to the Resource Stewardship meeting. As always, I wish I was better prepared to speak at length to all the great items that you've done,

but it meets with our mandate, it meets with the spirit and the intent of why a lot of us were elected. Quite honestly, folks at home, this is going to be a window to help us, if we use it properly, to get better bang for your buck, better efficiencies to make sure that the throughputs that are coming through with the services you get are way better.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before the Assembly is Bill 209, Cost of Public Services Transparency Act. Are there others wishing to add comment? The hon. Member for Airdrie-Cochrane, and then Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Guthrie: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to speak on Bill 209, the Cost of Public Services Transparency Act. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Red Deer-South for introducing this legislation. I have a great deal of respect for this member. He is a lawyer and an accountant, having an in-depth knowledge of taxation, and it's incredibly beneficial to work with someone with his qualifications, and I'm thankful for the occupations that he holds and for him occupying a seat in this Legislature. Thank you, Member.

Our government was elected to focus attention on jobs, economy, and fiscal responsibility. Part of that mandate deals with increasing revenues and reducing government spend with the goal of a balanced budget. Albertans told us when we were going door to door that they were worried about fiscal mismanagement by the NDP and that they sought increased transparency around how their tax dollars were spent, and I, too, share that concern. Mr. Speaker, Albertans are some of the hardest working people in the world. We're people with a can-do attitude. We buckle down to get the job done, and we like to enjoy this great province for everything it has to offer.

Mr. Speaker, my constituents in Airdrie-Cochrane want to retain as much of their hard-earned money as possible through low taxes, but they also want to make sure that government expenditures are completed with due care and attention. Unnecessary outlays are certainly not something that is appreciated in this province. Wasteful spending by previous governments increased debt, which diverted more and more money away from operating budgets to service that accumulating debt, money that would have been better served working for the people of this province through our valued public services. Excessive government spending can also lead to inflationary pressure. As more money floods the market, it increases liquidity and in turn decreases its value. You don't have to look very far to find an example of this out-of-control, unchecked spending; you simply look at the federal government, the federal Liberals.

The Prime Minister of Canada provides a great illustration of what not to do when managing a budget. As the leader of this country he stated in an interview, and I quote: when I think about the biggest, most important economic policy this government, if re-elected, would move forward, you'll forgive me if I don't think about monetary policy; you'll understand I think about families. What a fascinating comment. The hon. Member for Red Deer-South has referred to the PM as Canada's first NDP Prime Minister, and this categorization fits the narrative perfectly. NDP governments are known to spend with reckless abandon and have little interest for checks and balances and no worry of wasteful spending. There's simply a lack of accountability, and they do it in the name of families. Mr. Speaker, this socialist philosophy has it wrong. If one was concerned about families, they would be worried about their future, worried about their children and their grandchildren and how they're supposed to pay for these reckless spending habits.

4:30

Now, parents earn their income the hard way, save for the future of their family. They do this to leave a little something behind, to provide their children with a nest egg. They do not ignore monetary policy and claim that this is in the best interest of their family. That is completely contrary to the premise. This type of activity is selfish. If parents spent every penny that they earned and went deep in to debt, they would become a huge burden on their children as it would become the child's hardship to care for their parents.

Governments have no right to claim that wasteful spending habits are done with families in mind. Wild spending habits of irresponsible governments lead eventually to increased taxes. Somebody has to pay for it. It's the tax-and-spend mentality, Mr. Speaker: property taxes, carbon taxes, taxes on utilities, payroll taxes. There are new taxes that are surfacing regularly, and the list of them goes on and on. Socialist governments are addicted to spending. They run huge deficits and expect others to pay for it without asking questions: take, take, take while making life more expensive, leaving citizens frustrated.

Mr. Speaker, this is unacceptable, and that is why I'm appreciative of the Member for Red Deer-South bringing forward this legislation to implement a plan, a method, something to safeguard citizens with the goal of providing greater transparency on those tax dollars extracted from hard-working Albertans. This act will ensure that providers of publicly funded services detail their spending habits to Albertans. Really, what it is: a report card to the citizens of the province, a way for every Albertan to measure success or failure of their institutions, to compare year-over-year results or examine and analyze how our province stacks up against other jurisdictions.

This disclosure obligation, in my mind, is a common-sense approach, one that provides more visibility and awareness to not only the citizens but also to those government institutions. That awareness will provide more scrutiny from the public, and it will, in turn, make those organizations more accountable. The designated public services in question: they're yet to be determined. They will be chosen based upon consideration of known costs, those that have the greatest need to improve, and where the largest benefit from disclosure lies for the public. This could include everything from hospitals to schools and universities to continuing care centres.

Albertans want to know where their money is going and how it is being spent, and this legislation will do exactly that. Albertans have questions as to why postsecondary tuition fees are changing. They'll be able to see exactly how a university is spending their money and compare it with ease.

Mr. Speaker, the second goal of this act is to instill in Albertans the true cost of public services. We enjoy some of the highest quality services in the world, and we're grateful to have them. That said, they do come with a cost. Nothing is free, and taxpayers are on the hook. It is our hope that with greater transparency will come a greater appreciation of these shared costs.

Mr. Speaker, we know that these services are investments. They're investments in future generations who will one day lead this province. Yet it is troubling that there is a general lack of understanding of the cost of these investments, which is why instilling a sense of stewardship in our public resources is important. But those who do not pay attention to monetary policy are certainly not going to care about overspending of tax dollars. With the implementation of this bill, we will change all of that because additional watchdogs, that being the citizens of Alberta, will be watching and paying attention to wasteful or unnecessary cost overruns. The repercussions of poor financial management on the part of both individuals and governments – and certain unnamed drama teachers – leads to a lack of care and understanding of fiscal policy.

Mr. Speaker, our government inherited a financial mess, but fortunately our policies are again getting this province back on track and open for business. With greater transparency about how tax dollars are being spent and greater accessibility to the true costs of public services, we'll be able to make better decisions that will get Albertans back to work and doing the things that they love to do with a little more cash in their jeans. Again I want to thank the hon. Member for Red Deer-South for introducing this timely legislation, and I want to encourage all members of this House to support this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, will be supporting this bill, and I, too, want to thank the hon. Member for Red Deer-South for his consistent effort in fighting for economic freedom, fighting for individual opportunity and effective and efficient public programs. I appreciate him using his opportunity for a private member's bill to bring this forward.

[Mr. Amery in the chair]

You know, there's an old business saying, an old business principle: in order to manage something, you must be able to measure it. So what a great start, the opportunity to not only measure the cost of a program, the cost of a service but to measure the effectiveness, to see that it is doing what hard-earned taxpayer dollars were meant for, to see that it's doing it in an efficient manner, and for a government that's spending \$60 billion a year, there's so much opportunity for that to always be done better. I'm going to come back to that, but I want to switch gears.

I hope and believe that a strong private member's bill like this one, that strong support from everyone in this House can maybe shift this government's focus. Here's what I've seen in the last little while. This government not only ran a \$17 billion deficit last year, put Alberta taxpayers \$100 billion in debt, something where they so complained that the NDP was going to do that very same thing – well, they did it, too – but this year, when they only ran a \$6 billion deficit, they stand up and pat themselves on the back and say: "We're doing so, so well that we've brought in this business, that business, and as a couple of our daily newspapers have reported in the last couple of days, we're doing so well, Albertans, we're going to bring in a sales tax. We're going to look at bold action on the revenue side. What do you think of that?"

Mr. Speaker, I absolutely hope that this private member's bill from Red Deer-South and his consistent commitment to value for hard-working Alberta taxpayers will help this government refocus on ways to give our families and our Albertans more choice, more economic freedom, more control over their own money. At a time when, thankfully, royalties are up, spending is up, unfortunately. Let's look at ways to make families and communities stronger. I hope that somewhere in this bill and in this government they can find a way to look at where money has been wasted, where money is not getting its value.

Let's start with the \$2.4 billion in interest expense that this government is incurring on over \$100 billion of debt. Mr. Speaker, \$2.4 billion: I believe that would make it the fourth- or fifth-biggest line item in this government's expenditures. You know, that would be hundreds and hundreds of nurses, hundreds and hundreds of teachers and doctors, and that money instead is going to bankers in New York and Toronto and Zurich. We remember the Premier's famous line from three years ago, when he wanted to be elected, and here we are living that.

4:40

I hope that it will look at some of the money that gets spent and the effectiveness of why that money is spent. Question period today was interesting. I was flabbergasted to hear about 30,000 or 40,000 people in Lethbridge without access to a doctor, without access to a GP, after this government put in \$80 million more, which I believe the Premier suggested was a \$100,000 increase for every one of the rural physicians. Was this money not spent with effectiveness? Was this money not targeted to where it would really help Alberta families, in this case particularly Lethbridge? Again, I'm grateful to the Member for Red Deer-South to try to shine some transparency, some sunlight on this. Let's look for value.

You know, I'll tell you guys a story about Medicine Hat. Sixteen or 17 years ago we only had two doctors with hospital privileges delivering babies. My goodness, those two people worked their tails off helping Medicine Hat families and helping in one of the most important times in people's lives, but it wasn't sustainable. It was just too much. It was too hard. So some great local physicians, great local community advocates listened and set up a Medicine Hat maternity clinic in the hospital, where I believe nurses, nurse practitioners, Alberta Health Services people, and up to 15 or 16 doctors actually came up with a way to help expecting mothers, expecting fathers, expecting families to be absolutely engaged, in a full way, for complete health care.

Then under a prior government, sometime around 2012, jeez, I think the number was \$400 million in additions and improvements to the Medicine Hat hospital – I'm so grateful that that money was spent – including on a dedicated spot right inside the front door for the Medicine Hat maternity clinic. And what did this government do? It came along and shut it down. It shut it down without listening to local MLAs, without realizing the huge problem we were in 15 or 16 years ago, without realizing that we could get back to that someday. Like the Premier's letters to Ottawa, you know, letters that I sent were ghosted and not replied to, got us nowhere. Mr. Speaker, I just hope that someday this doesn't come back to hurt families of southern Alberta.

I want to come back to the principle that in order to manage something, you have to be able to measure it. This weekend I heard about yet another Cypress-Medicine Hatter who left Alberta for a hip replacement. This one wasn't to America. This guy went to Europe but got what he wanted on a timely basis. Wouldn't it be great if we could squeeze a little bit more value out of our system, if we could have more Albertans get helped here on a timely basis?

Mr. Speaker, I heard about a gentleman who looks after six hospitals in a different jurisdiction, how because of proper electronic health records, where the patient could interface as well to find out where they were in the system, when their next appointment was, and any serious concerns – you know, my goodness, that could be life-saving. They actually had the ability to help surgeons understand who had a practice or a technique that could help patients in a better way, that could draw the information in a better way. We could do more. We could help more Albertans. We could do it more on a cost-efficient basis, so we could, again, help more Albertans with more surgeries.

When I think back to what the Member for Red Deer-South was trying to do here – to help families, help Albertans who work hard and pay taxes and deserve these services – and when I look at what's happened in Lethbridge, when I look at what happened in Medicine Hat with the maternity clinic, when I look at the fact that we're a hundred billion dollars in debt and all that I hear out of this government is, "Sales tax, sales tax; tax us more." Mr. Speaker, I'm grateful to my colleague from Red Deer-South for bringing this

forward. I hope that every single member in this Legislature supports this, and then I hope the government actually does it.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other members who wish to speak? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to join the debate on Bill 209, Cost of Public Services Transparency Act, brought forward by the Member for Red Deer-South. As we've heard from other speakers, we know that this bill is to ask the public service to report the cost of using public services to people, to Albertans. I guess that public servants will do an analysis of what the actual cost is and communicate that to the Albertans who utilize that service, and then I guess it is reported in the annual reports of all the ministries. That's basically what this bill is saying. But it does sort of suggest that it's not a universal thing that every public service that an Albertan utilizes is reported. They're sort of designated and so unclear exactly how that will be clarified or decided upon or that kind of thing.

But on the face of it it seems to suggest that – as two previous speakers talked about, like, it's so important to measure things because in order to manage something, you need to know sort of what the scope of it is, I guess, and be able to assess it. That's why it says that it's so important to do that. But I guess I'm just a bit more cynical than some of the earlier speakers because I think what this government wants to do is to cut services, and this is going to be a tool for them to do that.

We already have seen that. They've done it in another bill and other policies when they've, like, done reports, because this is kind of a reporting issue, like the report on the supervised consumption sites that they did early in their mandate, which has been maligned widely, far and near, because of the lack of actual scientific process in doing the analysis. Also, they didn't even look at the efficacy of supervised consumption sites in it because they didn't care about that. They just cared about a biased approach. Then guess what they did? They cut supervised consumption services, harm reduction services across the province. Places like Lethbridge lost their supervised consumption site, the ARCHES program there. Here in Edmonton services have been cut. More cuts: Chumir is supposed to be closing in Calgary. And they all point to this report because they say, "Oh, we looked at what's going on," and this is why they're cutting it.

I just think that this bill is actually going to create an opportunity for the UCP to justify, whether it's scientific or not, an analysis of it. It probably won't be, because this government is not a friend of science. They like to have their biased approaches and then sort of get people to write reports to support their ideological view, which is really a neoliberal view. Certainly, they like to call us socialists, and I'm happy to hear that – I'm a social democrat; there's no question about that – but these folks are neoliberals or neoconservatives, and they believe in starving the beast, which is kind of what this is about. It's a political strategy employed by conservatives to cut government spending because we know that everything – this is the assumption, this huge assumption, they make – that government can do can be done better in private industry. Everything they want is to just make government smaller and smaller, so they're saying: starve the beast. It's, like, back to Reagan. It's back to, like, 1979.

And it's been proven to not work. It's been proven that, you know – I mean, if you just look to the south of us in America: how many communities are ghettoized, how much difficulty there is in cohesion in that country. It's bad policy, and of course it's what the

UCP espouses. This bill will just give justification for them to continue to attack important services that actually help Albertans.

4:50

I guess the other thing that kind of flies in the face of me actually sincerely believing that this government, this private member wants to increase transparency, increase accountability, increase efficiency, effectiveness – who knows? – all those nice words: I really am very cynical about that being the sincere desire because of what we've seen on COVID. This government doesn't want transparency. They have continued to be very evasive about what's going on. They don't want things to be measured. They don't want us to know exactly what they see, so they won't give us modelling information. They deny that they have strategies for this and that. They won't tell us how many surgeries have been cancelled.

All of a sudden now: oh, yes; we want people to know everything about the public service or what's going on. Like, please. Please. I mean, one hand saying one thing, one hand saying the other: it seems like there's a lot of incongruence when we are looking at this matter. It's hard for me to believe that there's any sincerity at all in what the government is doing with this bill. It's really just an attack on government services that help our society.

Certainly, we know that we pay collectively in taxes. We have a less progressive taxation system since the UCP was elected, but we pay jointly for services: our health care system, our education system, social services system. Certainly, the universal health care system, which has been studied the most – when you have to pay individually for those services, it can wipe a person out. We hear tragic, tragic stories about that from the U.S.

You know, if I'd lived in the States, I don't know what would have happened to me because not too long ago, in 2018, I was diagnosed with leukemia, and I almost died. I was in the hospital for 60 days. I had chemo treatment for a year after that time. There's no way I could have afforded any of that. I'm a single mom. I have managed to have a decent job. I'm a social worker, so I don't make a lot of money – I didn't, certainly, as a social worker – but I managed to support my children and care for them. But if I was American, I think I would have been wiped out by that. We know the value of public services, and we know that they're so important to well-being. Thankfully, I live in Canada, so I was supported.

But this bill is going – you know, say that I'm a senior, which I'm not far from, and maybe I got some special needs assistance from the Ministry of Seniors and Housing. I needed a lift chair, or I needed a new walker, or perhaps I took advantage of the program where you can get some remuneration when you have to come into a major centre. Say that maybe I live in Valleyview again when I'm a senior – who knows? – where I grew up. So when I come in, I can actually ask the Ministry of Seniors and Housing to support my costs for travel, the kilometrage, my food while I'm here, accommodation. Then I get home, and then I get a bill. I get a bill that says: you know, this is how much what you did has cost the government. I'm a senior, and I might be confused by that. Who knows? Maybe I won't be because I'll have stood in this Chamber and argued this point.

But maybe some seniors don't understand this, and they think: "Why is the government giving me a bill? Am I supposed to be paying for this? I'm retired now, but I have paid into, certainly, taxes my whole life." I think it might be quite upsetting. It's very curious to me how this government thinks that they will actually decide on what programs. What will be the fallout of that? How will people feel when they receive something like that? Maybe it's not clear whether it's a bill that they have to pay or just a bill for their own knowledge about those services.

I certainly ask my colleagues to not support this.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other members who wish to speak to Bill 209?

Seeing none, would the hon. Member for Red Deer-South wish to close debate?

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to appreciate all my colleagues who have taken time to speak to this bill. I just want Albertans to know how their tax dollars are spent. I don't care whether it's the PC government, the NDP government, or the UCP government. I do not care. The Cost of Public Services Transparency Act is at its heart empowering Albertans to know how their tax dollars are spent. It is so important to let Albertans know how their tax dollars are spent. That is always good policy.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, the 2019 Canadian consumer tax index says that the average Canadian family spends more on income taxes than basic necessities. If taxes cost more than basic necessities, taxpayer literacy is a necessary core component of financial literacy. In these challenging times it is urgent that there is more financial literacy, especially for our children. As a father of three, a teenaged daughter and two young adult sons, I want our children to enjoy the same opportunities that we have.

But, Mr. Speaker, we have a very serious problem. This province has a structural deficit in the billions of dollars. We have the first NDP Prime Minister of this country occupying Ottawa occurring, blasting through trillion-dollar debt. We need to let Albertans know and be more aware of their situation. This bill is simple. It is principled. Great stakeholders – the Alberta director of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, the CEO of the Red Deer & District Chamber of Commerce, and CEO of Canada Strong and Free – have all supported this bill.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, by letting Albertans know the cost of services they are paying for, it engages them more as citizens of Alberta and supports a culture of more accountability of government. Isn't that what we all want? Let's have more positive peer pressure helping government be better. In these challenging times, more than ever we need government to strive to be the best they can be.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I close debate.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:58 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Jones	Sigurdson, R.J.
Amery	Long	Singh
Barnes	Lovely	Smith
Dreeshen	McIver	Stephan
Fir	Nally	Toews
Frey	Neudorf	Toor
Getson	Nicolaides	Turton
Guthrie	Pon	van Dijken
Horner	Rosin	Walker
Hunter	Rowswell	Wilson
Issik	Schulz	Yaseen

Against the motion:

Dang	Pancholi	Schmidt
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Irwin Nielsen	Phillips Renaud	Sigurdson, L.
Totals:	For – 33	Against – 8

[Motion carried; Bill 209 read a second time]

Motions Other than Government Motions

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

Small and Medium-sized Oil and Gas Companies

525. Mr. Smith moved:

Be it resolved that the Assembly urge the government to consider taking the necessary steps to develop an incentive framework designed to assist in supporting the profitability of small and medium-sized oil and gas companies in Alberta while maintaining provincial and federal environmental standards.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to Motion 525. Before we can delve too deeply into this motion, it's probably good to understand the problem that we're addressing and that we're trying to give advice to the government on here. Alberta has had a problem regarding how to address orphaned and inactive and legacy well sites across this province. In my constituency alone there are approximately 3,000 orphaned, inactive, and legacy wells that need to be reclaimed. We were where the oil industry started in Alberta, so it is natural to think that we would have a significant number of these sites in my constituency.

Now, in the province of Alberta we've had two programs over the last number of years that have worked to address the thousands of wells across Alberta that need to be abandoned and reclaimed. The Orphan Well Association is an industry-funded organization that helps to reclaim orphaned and inactive well sites. In 2020 we had the adoption of the site rehabilitation program. It was introduced, and it has spent millions and millions, close to a billion, of dollars addressing well site downhole abandonment and reclamation work that will eventually end in the companies receiving a well site reclamation certificate, which is in the best interests of everyone in Alberta as that well site now has met the environmental standards that are necessary to be able to continue to be good stewards of our environment.

There are still thousands and thousands of well sites across Alberta that need to be reclaimed. In Alberta we've taken the approach that we will have a polluter-pay system to deal with the issues of inactive and orphaned wells. Part of the problem is that many of the small to medium-sized oil companies have been so badly hit in the last six years or so with the downturn in oil prices, with the lack of access to tidewater, and the worst recession in decades that they've not had the finances to address their inactive wells and to be able to reclaim them.

Now, several other issues have also added to the problem. In the past the regulator agreed in good faith to allow companies to transfer assets and liabilities, with the idea or the notion that the original company would not bear the liability for the future cleanup of that transferred asset, and the regulator assumed in good faith that the transferees would take responsibility for the cleanup and that the assets and the production from that asset would generate enough money to cover the cost of the cleanup without the need for any other mandates.

Meanwhile the energy companies believed that they would be able to decommission and close wells and obtain a reclamation certificate in a timely fashion, which would not only allow them to

reduce their liabilities but would also improve their corporate health and would also allow them to reduce operating costs from municipal property taxes and landowner lease payments as these sites were returned to the landowner or to the Crown for other uses after reclamation.

Unfortunately, none of this has occurred, and a series of events has caused this model to break down. Companies have not been able to obtain a reclamation certificate in a timely fashion. As a result, there's been no incentive to do surface reclamation or to decommission low-producing wells. Meanwhile for a period of time in the last, say, 10 years or so the regulator permitted well-financed, large companies to off-load significant liabilities to smaller companies, that have become overburdened with the finances of that well, with well site cleanup, with responsibilities that exceed their ability to pay for that reclamation and for that downhole abandonment. Plus, we had the Redwater decision, which put the liability for environmental cleanup ahead of other claims on a company's asset sheet.

5:20

In order to guide the industry and to keep the industry healthy, the Alberta Energy Regulator created a program called the liability management rating. The AER worked collaboratively with the government and with companies to develop and to implement a liability management program for all of the energy sectors, which helps to protect Albertans from significant potential environmental issues and costs associated with the closure of any kind of an energy project but especially the ones that we're talking about today, the well sites. The AER uses a liability management rating, an LMR, to help us assess a company's ability to address its abandonment, its remediation, and its reclamation obligations.

The LMR is calculated as a ratio of a company's deemed assets, its production, to its deemed liabilities, its abandonment and its reclamation costs. The AER expects companies to maintain an LMR above 1; otherwise, they require a security deposit to be made to cover the abandonment and the remediation and the reclamation costs if a company cannot meet its obligations. Now, a company can manage to improve its LMR by reducing its liabilities, by abandoning or reclaiming sites or selling less productive assets, or increasing its assets, by purchasing highly productive sites or improving production on existing sites.

In response to the Redwater decision, the AER has discretion over licence transfers, whether they can be bought or sold, between companies that have an LMR between 1 and 2. An increasing number of producers are finding it difficult under this AER approval to execute transfers, from 207, or 26 per cent of the total, to 569, or 72 per cent of the total, recently. Today any company with a licence management ratio of less than 2 has found it impossible to arrange financing for new drilling programs that would yield new revenues in order to pay for their obligations.

Finally, we had the collapse of the oil and natural gas prices in 2014. The revenue situation had become dire for the junior oil and gas sector over that period of time. We've seen over the last few years dozens of junior oil companies going bust, and their assets and their liabilities have been transferred into the industry-funded Orphan Well Association.

Today we face a situation where many of our oil and natural gas producers have an LMR that is under 2, and they find themselves either unviable or on the edge of viability. What's the answer? Well, we've used broad-based tax incentives in the energy industry in the past. We've seen that as a powerful method to incentivize business and the energy industry, going all the way back to days like under former Premier Peter Lougheed and Premier Ralph Klein.

One group of Albertans has come up with an incentive program called an R-star program to move companies hampered by a low LMR. Companies can earn royalty credits of the deemed liability value of a well upon completing a well abandonment, completing the reclamation or remediation construction, or receiving a reclamation certificate. To redeem the R-star credit, a company can attach an R-star credit to the drilling of a new well and on the new production of that well. This helps the energy company recover the cost of cleaning up liabilities while stimulating drilling. While it's true that the province will receive fewer royalties on a temporary basis, it is also true that the R-star will stabilize those companies with an LMR under 2 and will provide an economic incentive for companies to address liabilities of inactive wells while incentivizing drilling, which will mean more workers, profitable companies paying taxes and addressing their obligations to farmers, municipalities, and to the government of Alberta.

I applaud the government for being prepared to pilot the R-star program this coming spring. It is hoped that upon the successful completion of this pilot project it will clearly show that this program will help struggling companies to address their liabilities. They will also be able to live up to their obligations to abandon properly and to reclaim the wells that are at the end of life while at the same time providing the incentive to drill new wells, creating new royalties and jobs that accompany the drilling. R-star is good for the oil and gas companies, it is good for workers, and it is good for the environment. It will move the energy industry forward and out of some very tough times.

I speak in favour of Motion 525 with my whole heart as I believe it will move us forward as Albertans in the most important industry that we have in this province. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon has moved Motion Other than Government Motion 525. I see the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain would also like to debate.

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an absolute pleasure to rise today on Motion 525. Alberta's energy sector is a vital contributor to our economy. In order for our energy sector to prosper, we need the support of small and mid-sized producers, and that's exactly what the aim of this motion is. Now, this government has already made significant efforts to attract and support small to medium-sized producers across the province, and before I speak more to the broad goals of this motion, I'd like to take a few minutes to outline a few of these initiatives.

First off, Alberta has begun the implementation of the site rehabilitation program, aimed at providing support to small producers when it comes to oil well cleanup. The program provides grants and contracts that subsidize well cleanup, thereby ensuring environmental responsibility and providing financial incentive for small producers that clean up their oil wells. Now, the beauty of this program, Mr. Speaker, is that we're going to be encouraging investment into our energy sector, which will, in turn, create jobs for Albertans and stimulate our economy, and at the same time we will be regulating the environmental impact of the oil and gas industry.

Another initiative that's already well under way is a cohesive red tape reduction effort aimed at optimizing regulatory processes surrounding small and medium-sized producers. To date the government has already seen \$500 million in savings through this initiative. On top of that, we're looking at an estimated \$1 billion in savings by the end of 2022. Now, these are incredible numbers, Mr. Speaker, and they speak not only to the immediate benefits of such efforts but also to the potential of this motion.

Before I continue with the big-picture impact of this motion, allow me to cite a few examples of red tape reduction at work. By adding functionality to the one-stop application service, the AER has reduced application processing times dramatically for small companies and simultaneously improved regulatory oversight. The elimination of drilling and completion cost estimates under the modernized royalty framework means that industry won't have to submit estimates each time they want to drill a well. Furthermore, the AER has improved the wording of directive 60 by amending or deleting some obsolete or duplicated requirements that will reduce the regulatory burden on industry by cutting costs that are being put toward redundant protocols.

On top of red tape reduction and the aforementioned site rehabilitation program, the government has also begun a comprehensive liability management framework, that was announced back in July 2020. Now, this framework will further help small producers and industry at large bear the costs of site cleanup by providing practical and proactive guidance for struggling operators, who are often small and mid-sized producers. This system is being overseen by the licensee special action function, itself operated by the AER.

Now, there are a number of other actions that are being taken to monitor the environmental impact of small producers while also supporting their presence here in Alberta. For instance, the government has been implementing a revised water conservation policy for upstream oil and gas that will protect their valuable water resources by offering alternative water sources to the energy industry and particularly to small producers.

Another such initiative is Alberta's technology innovation and emissions reduction fund, which is exactly what it sounds like: a fund of around \$9.5 million geared towards supporting carbon capture, utilization, and storage projects. These technologies are crucial to Alberta's future. They are creating jobs and reducing emissions.

On top of this fund, Alberta has been working with conventional oil and gas stakeholders to develop methane emission reduction policies that are expected to save industry about \$600 million by 2024. Now, before I go on, Mr. Speaker, I want to emphasize that over \$300 million has already been made available from this program, with \$52 million of that coming from our methane reduction strategy alone.

I think that we can see the wide-ranging benefits that supporting small and mid-sized producers can have here in Alberta, not just for our energy sector but for our entire economy, and I'm sure I don't have to remind everyone that a strong economy means jobs for Albertans. With that being said, I want to circle back one last time to emphasize that all of these initiatives are being done with environmental responsibility very much in mind.

5:30

Our efforts to reduce emissions and to grow our energy sector have been successful and will continue to be successful as Alberta's recovery plan continues. Oil well cleanup incentives, red tape reduction, carbon capture technology, and emissions reductions strategies are all but a few of the long list of efforts being made by this government to make Alberta's energy sector one of the most innovative in the world. I think it goes without saying, Mr. Speaker, that I am more than happy to support this motion.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The hon. Member for Airdrie-Cochrane.

Mr. Guthrie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to have this opportunity to speak on an important motion brought about by the

Member for Drayton Valley-Devon. This member is a strong advocate for his constituents, and when it comes to the energy sector and being a champion for small and mid-sized players, he's second to none, so thanks for bringing this forward.

Alberta's energy sector is vital to our province's well-being. The sector keeps our economy running, and among the most important contributors to this sector are the hundreds of small producers that operate here. From a production perspective the large producers may get the attention, but when it comes to job creation, innovation, and entrepreneurial spirit, then it's clearly the small players that dominate. They are the heart and soul of Alberta's energy sector.

Yes, it's true that the oil and gas prices here have substantially rebounded from a six-year downturn in the market, but that does not mean that all is well and good. The cost to produce continues to climb, with newly implemented regulations and other factors at play. The industry struggles with issues around egress, the availability and cost of labour, land acquisition costs, red tape burdens, insurance rates, and financing. To make matters worse, the federal government is hell bent on destroying Alberta's energy industry.

The Prime Minister himself has discussed the phase-out of the oil sands, is forward about his intent to end fossil fuel production. He has opposed pipelines, and he is establishing more and more restrictions meant to damage the industry, things such as the carbon tax. And, by the way, more carbon taxes are lying in wait. Oh, yeah. We've got the clean fuel standard, which is just another carbon tax that the feds have waiting to unleash on Canadians possibly by the end of next year. The costs of heating homes and driving vehicles and in general the cost of goods will continue to go up from the already scheduled \$170 carbon tax, but the creation of this new one will only make matters worse.

Then there are also the methane regulations. Last year Alberta agreed to a 45 per cent decrease in methane emissions, but this was just recently brought forward by the feds, in perfect form, that they are going to move the goalposts, and they forecasted a change in those requirements to 75 per cent.

Then we have Bill C-48, legislation to ban the shipment of Alberta bitumen products only from deep-water ports in northern B.C. It's beyond me how the federal government has the right to discriminate and limit the sale of products or materials from any one province. If emissions are truly at the heart of their issue, they would ban the shipments of vehicles, planes, or any other motorized products out of Ontario and Quebec, but of course we know that that is not in the cards.

Bill C-69, that's another gem. It implements subjective analysis into project assessment. Even with the green light on regulatory approvals a project can be stopped at any point without cause. This certainly makes investment decisions in Canada much more complicated, Mr. Speaker.

Furthermore, the Trudeau government created ambiguous net zero legislation and, without consultation, are going to impose an emissions cap on Alberta production. Mr. Speaker, this is just the tip of the iceberg, but all this is done by the feds in an attempt at economic destabilization of Alberta's economy. The destructive nature is astonishing. Look at the recent appointment of an extremist to the position of federal minister of the environment. This should be a signal to every Albertan that tensions are going to continue to mount as the uninformed, ideological drive to eliminate fossil fuel production in Canada ramps up. To me, none of this makes sense.

Alberta is a world leader in innovation and environmental stewardship. Alberta producers have always been a dominant force in research and development. As an engineer, small-business person, farmer, rancher, family man I care about the future of this province, and I expect that my peers in this Chamber do as well,

just as the hard-working employees of Alberta's energy industry do, Mr. Speaker. We all want similar things, don't we? A future for our kids, to provide for our families, a clean and safe environment for everyone. That is why this attack on Alberta makes not one lick of sense.

Displacing Canadian production only leads to an expansion of imports. It leads to increased emissions as this displaced product comes from countries with significantly lower environmental standards, not to mention the human rights violations. It comes with job losses and lower wages. It comes with decreased energy supply but no change in world demand, which, of course, will lead to higher prices. This one is interesting, Mr. Speaker. It comes with lower government revenues as the energy industry is the largest, biggest single contributor to those revenues coffers. So are the feds going to reduce spending? Doubtful, but lower revenues are going to either lead to higher debt or reduced services, both of which are bad. I ask you: how does this help our kids? How does this help us provide for our families? In what universe does this lead to an improved environment? It doesn't.

Mr. Speaker, there's been significant work done around red tape reduction, taxation, and liability where our government has made improvements, especially trying to work within the confines of the federal government's imposition. Programs such as TIER to help fund producers with environmental initiatives and in other areas such as geothermal, helium, hydrogen, and even SMR are where we're trying to create a positive climate for investment. This motion also urges government to develop an incentive framework designed to assist in supporting the profitability of small and medium-sized producers.

With that in mind, Mr. Speaker, I want to mention one innovative approach that was mentioned earlier. Since I've had the opportunity to consult with groups on a program called R-star, I as well as other MLAs in here feel that this program has the potential to benefit our province's economy, create jobs for Albertans while at the same time benefiting the environment. The concept of R-star is straightforward. After a well is abandoned, companies earn a future royalty credit based on a well site's precalculated liability value. I should add that this credit is only redeemable here in Alberta. Instead of a heavy-handed approach to enforcing reclamation or handing out billions of dollars in grant money, programs like R-star incentivize companies to clean up sites, which creates an asset through the R-star credit, therefore boosting their balance sheet and at the same minimizing environmental impact. Programs like R-star will continue to make our province attractive to all but particularly for small and mid-size producers, bringing jobs to Alberta and incentivizing our oil and gas industry's already impeccable environmental record.

It's no secret that our economy has suffered over the course of the last two years with COVID and longer when considering the totality of the sector downturn, but continued support for small producers can provide a huge boost to Alberta's economic recovery, which, I might add, is well under way. Let's not forget the undeniable fact that our energy partners continue to play a vital role in not only Alberta's economy but also that of Canada. One should not buy into a naive narrative that the oil and gas sector is inherently bad for the environment. We know that without Alberta the global environmental footprint suffers. We continue, and we should continue, to embrace programs and initiatives that showcase how truly innovative Alberta's energy sector is and proudly defend those who earn their living in the field.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I want to again thank the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon for bringing forward this topic for discussion, and I want to encourage all members to support this motion.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to adjourn debate. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

5:40 **Government Bills and Orders**
Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Frey in the chair]

The Acting Chair: Hon. members, I'm pleased to call the committee to order.

Bill 78
Alberta Housing Amendment Act, 2021

The Acting Chair: We are on amendment A1. Do I see any other hon. members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross. [some applause]

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you to the colleagues of this House for a wonderful welcome to speak to the amendment on Bill 78, the Alberta Housing Amendment Act, 2021. I particularly am proud of getting up here this afternoon because this bill is near and dear to my heart. It is the result of a comprehensive and exhaustive review of the affordable housing sector, and I am thankful to the Minister of Seniors and Housing for putting her faith in me by appointing me to the chair of the Affordable Housing Review Panel, which I chaired in the summer of 2020, a panel made up of housing experts and partners from all across our province. We reviewed Alberta's affordable housing system and provided recommendations in that report for improving it.

Now, I say that it's exhaustive because we made significant efforts to get this report right. We considered market trends and projections, we compared approaches to other housing jurisdictions, and we heard directly from groups of Albertans most in need of affordable housing. Their insight and their advice helped form the panel's report, which, in turn, contributed to the amendments that we see today within Bill 78. I think that proves that this is truly a refined and appropriate piece of legislation.

I believe that all members in this House will agree that access to affordable housing is a fundamental and inclusive right in this society. Unfortunately, Madam Chair, that foundation is cracked. We have thousands upon thousands of families on waiting lists in this province, and the system is buckling under the weight of an outdated system. Affordable housing in our province must keep up with 21st-century demands, and that means finding innovative and smart ways to deliver housing in our province. The days of buying and building affordable housing complexes and maintaining them need to stop and, like many other jurisdictions, must evolve.

I've had the opportunity to listen to the debate here in great detail – like I said, it is truly near and dear to my heart – and I respect the opinions of all the members in this House, Madam Chair, but let's correct some of the fallacies that were discussed over the course of this debate.

During the summer of 2020 we heard from hundreds of stakeholders. Our panel consulted with housing advocates, not-for-profits, private industry, housing management bodies, Indigenous groups, community- and faith-based organizations. Anyone and everyone who was interested in submitting a response was welcomed and encouraged to do so. Because of that, Madam Chair, we delivered 19 recommendations for transformation in the housing sector. I don't have time to talk about all 19, but I'll address some of them here today.

Madam Chair, we heard almost universally from stakeholders that the archaic system of building and providing housing cannot keep up with demand. It is absolutely impossible, not in Alberta,

not anywhere else. Instead, we learned that this government must adopt partnerships with not-for-profit organizations, housing management bodies, private enterprise, and others to find ways to deliver more housing for our money. That's exactly what Bill 78 seeks to do.

We heard from stakeholders who wanted us to incorporate mixed-income models within housing in this province. For those of you who are interested, these are housing developments that feature both market and subsidized rental rates. We know from our consultations that eligible Albertans in mixed-income housing models are much more likely to transition out of affordable housing and into the market. This is primarily the goal, Madam Chair. We want to provide affordable housing to those who need it – there is absolutely no one in this House that denies that – but we want families to be able to use these opportunities to get back on their feet and transition out of affordable housing as well, to give space to those who next need it.

Madam Chair, we heard that our rent supplement program in this province needs to be reworked. We made recommendations to strengthen it so that eligible Albertans can use the supplements to find a home when they need it. Do you know what happens when an affordable housing unit becomes available for an eligible family? In today's system too often an eligible family has to take that affordable housing unit. It doesn't matter where it is. It could be in the same city. It could be on the other side of town. It could be in another city altogether. The chances are that that family who needs it is going to take it. How does that system allow for families to form links in their communities? How does that system allow our children to establish friends in their neighbourhoods? How does that system allow for that family to form a network and form roots in the neighbourhood that they've become accustomed to?

Mr. Turton: It doesn't.

Mr. Amery: It doesn't. I hear my colleague saying, "It doesn't." That's absolutely right, Madam Chair.

A strong rental supplement program lets families choose where they want to live. It allows them to choose the type of home that they want. It allows them to choose the neighbourhood, the community, the school that their children go to. It alleviates the government's responsibility to maintain the unit as an ongoing concern forever. Yes, it has an economic benefit as well. It puts money right back into local communities.

After months of consultation one thing is clear. The panel recommendations are sound, and Bill 78 will allow the government to accomplish its goals of delivering affordable housing to all Albertans.

Now, Madam Chair, I heard the members opposite heckling a little bit earlier. They're not going to like what I have to say, and that's fine. They want to paint a picture of doom and gloom and pretend that they have all of the answers, but the good news is that we have the truth. Have the members opposite forgotten about their failed housing policies, that the previous government forced onto Albertans in their four-year tenure? It was a terrible sight to see, and the fact that they made little progress to upgrade critical housing infrastructure led to years of wasted and ineffective policies for Albertans who need it most.

Madam Chair, I really wanted to sit here with an open mind and believe what some of the members opposite were saying over the course of this debate. [interjections] I hear them yelling now, and we're going to have to get into some more detail since that's what they've asked for. I really wanted to believe what they had to say, so I went digging through the course of the panel report and the review, and I found the NDP kryptonite: the facts. Between the

2015 to 2019 fiscal year the former NDP government mustered up 1,785 new and regenerated affordable housing units. Not bad. In two years, however, this government has built more than 1,500 units under the supervision of our Minister of Seniors and Housing. We're on track to build another . . . [interjections]

5:50

The Acting Chair: Order. Hon. members, while the chair is speaking, you are not.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross has the floor.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Madam Chair. Let me repeat that. In two years this government built more than 1,500 units and is on track to build another 1,800, far more than the NDP ever hoped to do. Over the last two years Alberta's government has built safe, affordable housing for individuals, for seniors, and for families on low income.

Moreover, Madam Chair, the NDP made it a mission to hijack the development of affordable housing in this province by creating an environment – listen here, folks – where partnership, investment, and co-operation were impossible. Let me say this a little more clearly. The members opposite, when in government, created an affordable housing market that kept Albertans away from being able to help other Albertans. Why would they have done this? I'm not sure. But it could be possible that they don't believe in the true value of hard work, that everyone in this province believes in, where Albertans in this province live to help their neighbours have a better life day in and day out.

Moving forward, this bill is fundamental for our road forward over the next 10 years as it will amend the Alberta Housing Act and associated regulations to enable our key initiatives under the 10-year affordable housing strategy, where Alberta's government will take bold action to provide more affordable housing options that meet the needs of Albertans with low income. As stated, the passing of this bill, Bill 78, is essential in our province achieving the 10-year goal, which is significantly connected to what the Minister of Seniors and Housing brought forward earlier this year, known as stronger foundations, Alberta's 10-year strategy to improve and expand affordable housing.

Look, folks. Members of this House, Madam Chair, I've sat with the experts. We've canvassed the entire province. We've talked to everybody that we could possibly talk to, and this is the proper path forward. I promise you that this is the right way to do this.

With that said, Madam Chair, I move that the committee rise and report on Bill 78. Thank you. [interjections]

The Acting Chair: Order.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Cross, I just want to confirm that you are moving to rise and report progress on Bill 78 and that you were referring to amendment A1.

Mr. Amery: My apologies. I do move that the committee rise and report progress.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Thank you very much, hon. member.

[Motion carried]

[The Speaker in the chair]

Mrs. Frey: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 78. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, does the Assembly agree in the report? If so, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. In my opinion, the ayes have it. That motion is carried and so ordered.

Ms Issik: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Assembly be adjourned until 7:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:55 p.m.]

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