



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, December 7, 2021

Day 138

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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

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

Nally, Hon. Dale, Morinville-St. Albert (UC)
Neudorf, Nathan T., Lethbridge-East (UC)
Nicolaidis, Hon. Demetrios, Calgary-Bow (UC)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
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Nixon, Jeremy P., Calgary-Klein (UC)
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Pon, Hon. Josephine, Calgary-Beddington (UC)
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Sawhney, Hon. Rajan, Calgary-North East (UC)
Schmidt, Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (NDP)
Schow, Joseph R., Cardston-Siksika (UC),
Deputy Government House Leader
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Sigurdson, Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)
Sigurdson, R.J., Highwood (UC)
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP)
Toews, Hon. Travis, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)
Toor, Devinder, Calgary-Falconridge (UC)
Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC)
Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UC)
Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UC)
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, Calgary-North (UC)
Vacant, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche

Party standings:

United Conservative: 20

New Democrat: 24

Independent: 2

Vacant: 1

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Philip Massolin, Clerk Assistant and Director of House Services	Amanda LeBlanc, Deputy Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>	

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Mike Ellis	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions
Tanya Fir	Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction
Nate Glubish	Minister of Service Alberta
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Adriana LaGrange	Minister of Education
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Muhammad Yaseen	Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism

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Martin Long	Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Tourism
Jackie Lovely	Parliamentary Secretary to the Associate Minister of Status of Women
Nathan Neudorf	Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Parks for Water Stewardship
Jeremy Nixon	Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Community and Social Services for Civil Society
Searle Turton	Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy
Dan Williams	Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Culture and for la Francophonie

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Rowswell
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jones

Allard
Eggen
Gray
Hunter
Phillips
Rehn
Singh

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Neudorf
Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring

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

Select Special Child and Youth Advocate Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Schow
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jones

Goehring
Lovely
Nixon, Jeremy
Pancholi
Sabir
Smith
Turton

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Lovely
Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

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

Select Special Information and Privacy Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Walker
Deputy Chair: Mr. Turton

Allard
Carson
Dang
Dreeshen
Ganley
Long
Stephan

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Milliken

Allard
Ceci
Long
Loyola
Rosin
Shepherd
Smith
Sweet
van Dijken

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Cooper
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schow

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

Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

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

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

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Smith
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

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

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Ms Phillips
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

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

Select Special Committee on Real Property Rights

Chair: Mr. Sigurdson
Deputy Chair: Mr. Rutherford

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

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Hanson
Deputy Chair: Member Ceci

Dach
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Getson
Guthrie
Lovely
Rehn
Singh
Turton
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, December 7, 2021

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Statement by the Speaker

American Sign Language Interpretation during the Daily Routine

The Speaker: Members, before proceeding today, as I would never anticipate the business of the Assembly but one can assume that we are heading towards the last number of days of this legislative session, I would like to make an announcement to notify the Assembly that starting in the spring of 2022, the spring sitting, coverage of the daily Routine will also be provided with American Sign Language interpretation. As all members will know, increasing access to our democracy is an important initiative to the Speaker as well as many members of this Assembly. ASL interpreters will be working out of the media room in the Edmonton Federal Building, and their signing will be able to be viewed via picture-in-picture on the broadcast of the Assembly, accessible on the Assembly website as well as Alberta Assembly TV.

Members' Statements

COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout

Mr. Nielsen: Vaccines are our path out of this pandemic and the key to our provincial recovery. Albertans know this, and I would like to offer my thanks to each and every Albertan who has stepped up to get vaccinated to protect themselves, their families, and communities. Since vaccines are so critical to the future of our province and economy, our job here should be to ensure that it is as simple and convenient as possible for everyone to get vaccinated, a priority lost on the UCP as they continue to fight to put their antisocial base above the public health of Albertans.

This government talks about their belief in science and claims to be supporters of vaccines, but one only needs to look at their record. The Premier, Education minister, and Health minister steadfastly refused to put COVID-19 vaccination clinics in schools. Even though teachers, parents, medical experts say that it will help get youth vaccinated, this government cherry-picks stats and uses that as an excuse to block this simple measure.

Vaccine passports were a simple policy that would have increased vaccination rates, protected small businesses, and helped prevent the worst of the fourth wave. Again, health care workers, municipal leaders, businesses leaders, and the people of Alberta called for these. Instead of listening, the Premier sat on his hands and refused to act upon them until the very moment he was forced into a crisis that nearly collapsed our health care system.

The UCP has caused untold hurt, stress, pain, and anxiety with their fourth wave failures. Tens of thousands will live with the consequences of the UCP incompetence for the rest of their lives. A choice now faces the UCP. They can continue to show their half-hearted commitment to vaccines and put Albertans at risk for yet another wave of COVID-19, or they can join Albertans and health workers in being committed to ensure that we are able to emerge from this pandemic once and for all.

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

Government Achievements

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

'Twas a few weeks before Christmas, and all through this House

The NDP was stirring; they constantly grouched,

Their ideas long-failed at their leader's behest,

Visions of capitalism, in which they all detest.

But out of a pandemic came a great swagger.

Alberta's recovery plan was working, which made them much sadder.

Jobs and investment were beginning to grow.

The deficit plummeted, while revenues goed.

The job-creation tax cut was just a trick;

It was more giving than good old Saint Nick.

After the NDP's reign our province was sad.

Strong conservative policies made the people glad.

Now the economy reminds us of days gone by,

When opportunities soared and oil prices were high.

"But this boom is different," the journalists crow.

Our economy is diversified and continues to grow.

From technology to hydrogen, to film and TV,

Alberta is as strong and resilient as a good Christmas tree.

The NDP winced at all the trucks on our roads

Driving to the patch and carrying loads.

Alberta is back. It's everywhere, you see.

Major projects are being announced from Zama to Calgary.

Now we should all be cheering for this great land we call home,

But the NDP are unhappy about everything, including this poem.

They yell and scream and misrepresent the truth;

They're about as useful as an old wisdom tooth.

Their policies failed, and for that they were fired,

And now they're doubling down and asking to be rehired.

But they took no action when they had the chance,

Except with Trudeau, a partner they love to dance.

The COVID pandemic was a true setback.

Now our province is leading the country and on the right track.

And as we continue to depart for a short Christmas break,

To spend time with family, drink eggnog, and eat yummy cake,

Remember to shop local when you're out buying your gifts.

Alberta has the best entrepreneurs in the world, and they may need a lift.

I look forward to 2022, when our province will soar to new heights.

Until then, Merry Christmas to all and to all a good night.

Eye Health

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, there's nothing like two weeks face down to justify heads-up on an issue of importance to all Albertans, our eyesight. As I sing the praises of our provincial health care system and the retinal team at Royal Alexandra hospital, I reflect with gratitude that it was but 36 hours from diagnosis of retinal detachment to being operated on with the greatest of courtesy, patience, and care, noting I am now on the road to recovery with encouraging results to date.

Mr. Speaker, did you know that all treatments for eye injury, retinal detachment, and diseases such as cataracts, glaucoma, and diabetic retinopathy are covered by our public health system? Many Canadians identify vision loss as their most feared disability, yet of the 60 per cent experiencing some symptoms of eye disease, only

half will seek advice from a health care professional according to the Canadian Ophthalmological Society. Trust me when I say that the prospect of vision loss can be frightening while the reality is that vision impairment or loss currently affects the daily lives and livelihoods of thousands of Albertans.

Further, 90 per cent of vision loss is preventable with early detection, and I learned that in the case of retinal detachment emergency surgery is critical to optimal outcomes. The Canadian Association of Optometrists recommends adults receive an eye exam every two years. Infants should have their first exam between six and nine months, while school-aged children and those over 65 should have one annually. Thanks to the aforementioned organizations, the Eye Physicians and Surgeons Association of Alberta, the Alberta College and Association of Opticians, and the CNIB our province enjoys broad support from medical professionals and visionary advocates that empower people afflicted by vision impairment or impacted by blindness to live their dreams and tear down barriers to inclusion.

Mr. Speaker, until next May, when we recognize Vision Health Month in Canada, please see your way to wearing your sunglasses, focus on scheduling eye exams, bring clarity and vigilance to any changes, challenges, and may we all treasure our sense of most importance, our vision.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Buffalo has a statement.

Fort McMurray Disaster Recovery Support and Emergency Service Wait Times

Member Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has abandoned the people of Fort McMurray. The Premier vowed to support the community and the residents of Fort McMurray after the catastrophic flooding last year but then almost immediately turned around and washed his hands of ever supporting them again with changes to the disaster recovery program that mean, should another flood or fire hit the city, the province will not offer a cent of support.

The Municipal Affairs minister lectured the people of Fort McMurray about where their homes and businesses were located and defended the decision to cut off government support after this flood. He called it, quote, common sense. I call it betrayal, Mr. Speaker, a betrayal of a community that has long supported the economy of Alberta, provided jobs to people around Canada and around the world. And it doesn't stop with the UCP refusing to ever step up in the event of another natural disaster.

The government botched EMS in Fort McMurray. Wait times are increasing, service levels are dropping, and there are fewer and fewer ambulances on the road. Paramedics know it. Firefighters know it. Even the lone remaining UCP MLA in Fort McMurray knows it. There are stories of people waiting longer for help and, in at least one tragic case, of a life being lost while waiting for a long-delayed ambulance. But ask the Premier and he'll tell you that there's no problem. He'll again defend these changes that have caused suffering in the Fort McMurray community. Another betrayal of a community that the UCP pretends to support.

I want to assure the people of Fort McMurray that while this government ignores your needs and piles on the stresses and anxieties and burdens and refuses to step in to help you recover from future disasters, our NDP caucus has your back and will always have your back. You deserve nothing less.

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

1:40 Council of State Governments National Conference

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I had the unique opportunity to attend the 2021 Council of State Governments National Conference in Santa Fe, New Mexico. I was honoured to represent Alberta for CSG – West, CSG midwest, co-chair the Canada-U.S. Relations Committee, and help host at the Canada-U.S. reception. Fostering relationships with our friends and neighbours here in Canada and south of the border is more important than ever as we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. To spend time with members from Saskatchewan and Quebec as well as Michigan, Nebraska, and many others is the best way to tell our great story about energy, agriculture, and the environment.

To be able to share the facts that Canada and the United States share the longest undefended border in the world and that more than \$200 billion U.S. of trade crosses that border each year is an incredible experience, especially when you consider that almost half of that trade is from Alberta alone, at nearly \$100 billion Canadian each year. Alberta is an economic powerhouse, and we should take time to consider that approximately \$70 billion of energy trade, \$5.1 billion of plastic and chemical trade, \$3.2 billion of manufacturing, \$3.5 billion of agri- and agri-food products, and \$1.7 billion of lumber take place each year. Also, to discuss our continued efforts to lower carbon emissions as well as implementing the technology innovation and emissions reduction regulation to further drive that success.

I went into the conference with the goal of telling Alberta's story: who we are, what we're doing, and how we're doing it. When we work together, we can realize economic growth and environmental protection on both sides of the border, building on the over 900,000 jobs in Alberta and key partner states. The integration of supply chains in trade, manufacturing, and agriculture have never been more critical. Items like aluminum and steel, milk and cheese, auto parts, trailers, meat, and even french fries continually cross our borders thousands upon thousands of times each year. I look forward to working together with our Canadian and U.S. neighbours to identify new opportunities and leave behind one of the most challenging times in our history.

Thank you.

Deaths of Children in Care and Youth Transitioning out of Care

Ms Pancholi: Thirty-five. That's the number of children and young people in the child intervention system who have died in Alberta since April. The Child and Youth Advocate reports that number is actually closer to 48. Eleven children under the age of five, 19 young people transitioning out of care, 41 Indigenous children and young people: staggering numbers associated with tragic loss. Every member of this Assembly should pause and let that sink in.

This is an appalling tragedy that we all bear responsibility for, but accountability rests with the government because these children are the responsibility of government. The government is acting as their parent, responsible for their care, their safety, and their well-being. Instead of taking that responsibility to heart, the Minister of Children's Services fundamentally betrayed young people transitioning out of care. She promised them she wouldn't end their supports during the pandemic, but she did, cutting them off from financial supports and the support of their caseworker. She hasn't once apologized for this betrayal.

When asked about a much-needed youth opioid strategy, as recommended by the Child and Youth Advocate, the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions chose a sickening display of aggressive yelling, to the cheers of his UCP caucus, instead of

telling us why he has no plan to protect the most vulnerable Albertans. Mr. Speaker, while this UCP government focuses on political zingers, children and youth are dying under their watch.

The 2018 Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention made 36 recommendations to improve outcomes for children in the system, which were supposed to all be implemented by 2022. The Minister of Children's Services has removed those timelines and won't account for what work she's actually done. She's just doing an internal review instead.

Mr. Speaker, this is the deadliest year on record by far for children and young people in care, and not one member of the UCP is taking this seriously. Albertans are outraged by this government's response as children and young people are dying, but I am more than angry. I'm sickened, and every member of this Assembly should be, too.

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

COVID-19 Protective Measures and Individual Freedom

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the last two years COVID-19 and variants have caused difficulty and division throughout the country. Humans are social creatures, created with the innate desire to communicate with one another. A virus that spreads when we congregate pits that quality and our freedoms against the need for safety in this society. We must protect our hospital system's capacity and the lives of vulnerable Albertans, but this must be done while maintaining our cherished freedoms: the freedom to gather and assemble, the freedom to worship, the freedom to make a living, and the conscience and liberty rights of all Albertans. We must protect both lives and liberties. If in protecting lives you must restrict rights, then those restrictions must reach the Charter standard of reasonableness, and they must be as minimal and as temporary as possible.

The latest issue for many Albertans has been the vaccine mandate. We should not be a society divided between the vaccinated and the unvaccinated. Rather, we should be Albertans dedicated to protecting the lives, livelihoods, and liberties of all of our citizens. We must have as much compassion for our neighbours who for health, religious, and conscience reasons cannot get the vaccine as we do for those who are vulnerable.

Christmas marks the celebration of the birth of Christ, God in human form, entering the world to show compassion to people and reconcile them to himself. In the Book of Isaiah 9:6 it says, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government will be upon His shoulders." Our Charter of Rights and Freedoms recognizes that our rights are not given to us by government but from God.

Mr. Speaker, as we enter this Christmas season, I would like to take the time to wish everyone a Merry Christmas and suggest that the pathway forward into the new year is to protect lives, livelihoods, and the liberties of all Albertans. But above all, we need to treat each other with kindness and exhibit compassion towards each other, regardless of our COVID positions, as we continue to live under God, the rule of law in a COVID world.

Unvaccinated Albertans

Mr. Hunter: It looks like we are nearing the end of session, so let me wish everyone a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. May we all find peace, joy, and tranquility with family and friends this joyous season.

Mr. Speaker, at the beginning of each day you lead the Chamber's proceedings with a traditional prayer. I will only quote a few sentences from that prayer for the purpose of context. It says:

Grant . . . to Members of the Legislative Assembly . . . the guidance of Your spirit. May they never lead the province wrongly through love of power . . . or unworthy ideas but, laying aside all . . . prejudices, keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all.

I have been pondering the words of that prayer that implore us to lay aside all prejudices and seek to improve the condition of all.

Our government has been tasked with the untenable responsibility of balancing COVID restrictions, meant to protect the elderly and vulnerable of our society, and maintaining the maximum liberties and freedoms so cherished by democratic societies. There is, however, a sector of our society that has fallen through the cracks of our government's attempt to achieve this balance, and that is the people who have chosen not to get vaccinated. This minority of our society makes up approximately 10 per cent of the population that is 12 or older. They are a minority and as a minority deserve to be protected under the law, just as the majority does.

For hundreds of years western societies have championed pluralism, which means that differing views and beliefs can and should exist together. I implore all of those who love freedom, that champion liberty to reject the tyranny of the masses over the few. History warns us that it is dangerous to deviate from the time-tested principle of pluralism. My prayer is that we will learn from the past lest we repeat it, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

CBC Poll on Alberta

Mrs. Allard: Mr. Speaker, in October of this year Albertans spoke out in the equalization referendum, making it clear that our province is treated unfairly within Canada and that we deserve a fair deal. In a word, Albertans want respect. But beyond our relationships within Confederation respect for our province is a wider issue. Beyond policy and government too often our province is shown clear disrespect from the institutions and controlling interests of eastern Canada.

An example of this can often be seen in the state broadcaster, the CBC. Every Albertan knows that the CBC often reflects the perspectives of Canada's Laurentian elites, and given that the CBC is headquartered in Toronto, this comes as little surprise. But as common as this is, today I must speak out about an article and poll published by CBC this past weekend. The CBC chose to ask a range of questions of Canadians about their perception of Alberta. Would they feel comfortable living here? Is Alberta welcoming to immigrants? Are Albertans tolerant of those who are different? Do we care about climate change? Are we well positioned for the future of our economy? Mr. Speaker, you get the idea. We can all see that these questions were intended to prod tired stereotypes and falsehoods about our province.

Well, here is what I have to say to the CBC. Alberta has for decades been a top destination for other Canadians and newcomers alike. We are a welcoming and diverse place. We care about our environment, and we produce the highest quality, most ethically produced petroleum products in the world. We will produce those products for decades to come, and on top of that, we will produce resources and products to supply the economy of the future. Just as we have for decades, we will be the fastest growing economic engine of Canada, powering our entire country forward.

This is Alberta's story, not the misleading narrative of disrespect that the CBC wants to spin. May I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that if the

CBC tried writing this story, they might actually get more Albertans tuning in?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

COVID-19 Response and Health System Capacity

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, this fall Albertans should have seen this government take responsibility for the tragic fourth wave. Albertans deserve a plan for rescheduling surgeries, fixing health care, and bringing back doctors. Instead, all they got was more UCP scandals, lawsuits, and excuses. While the fourth wave crashed into Alberta, the Premier was in Europe, the Health minister was on holiday, and the acting minister refused to act, a profound failure that led to more lives lost and more Albertans infected. To the Premier – last chance – are you sorry?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, once again, I'd like to thank Albertans for their resilience, for stepping up to the plate to crush the fourth wave of COVID, for the diligence and the care they're showing for their neighbours. While the NDP likes to divide Albertans on COVID, we want to praise the hundreds of thousands of people who've stepped up in the past three months to get vaccinated, pushing our first-dose vaccination rate amongst adults to just about 90 per cent, and people getting booster shots. We want to thank those parents who are making informed decisions around pediatric vaccines. Thanks to all of those decisions, we're in a radically better position today.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, more than 1,000 Albertans died from COVID in the last four months alone. It's not too much to ask this Premier to show some remorse. Instead, he's hiding the consequences of his failure. We have now asked 16 times for the number of Albertans whose surgeries were cancelled; today is 17. Can the Premier tell us exactly how many Albertans as of today have had their surgeries cancelled in the fourth wave? Is he hiding, does he not know, or does he just not care?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, once again, we've shared that information. The very good news is that thanks to the diligence of Albertans we're now at about 86 per cent of traditional surgical capacity. Numbers continued to come down in the past two weeks, which bodes well for getting back to 100 per cent. The hon. the Minister of Health will be providing a comprehensive update on surgical wait times and the action plan to get ahead of them, part of which will involve the nearly \$1 billion of additional funding in this year's budget to reduce the surgical wait times left behind by the last NDP government.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, we have 45,000 people in Lethbridge with no doctor, 24 communities with hospital bed closures, 90-minute EMS waits, tens of thousands of cancelled surgeries, we think, yet the Premier just spent six weeks on palace intrigue: stage-managing his political convention, defending himself from toxic workplace allegations, and firing cabinet ministers. To the Premier: when exactly will he get around to focusing on people's health, their doctors, their surgeries, and for the 18th time, how many surgeries have been cancelled in the fourth wave as of today?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've addressed that question. This government is making historic, unprecedented investments in health care for Albertans. The Health budget today is the highest in

the province's history, and we've provided, for example, \$80 million for rural physician recruitment and retention for about 750 rural physicians. We respect the great work of our front-line health care workers. We're there to support them. Just as every health system in Canada and around the world has been coping with COVID, we want to say thank you to all of those great professionals.

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

Ms Notley: Eighteen questions; 18 failures to answer.

Kindergarten to Grade 6 Draft Curriculum

Ms Notley: Now, Mr. Speaker, the UCP's K to 6 curriculum has been repeatedly discredited. Not a single expert outside of the Premier's Facebook friends will say that it supports the learning kids deserve. Yesterday this Premier's gag order on the teachers who worked on it came off. Here's one quote. "They gave us a pile of [excrement] and then told us to look through the [excrement] for corn that's digestible." That teacher didn't actually say "excrement." Why won't the Premier admit that his curriculum is a pile of you-know-what and withdraw it?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, classy as ever. Isn't it nice to see the Christmas spirit over there? I'm sorry. Trigger warning: the NDP doesn't like to talk about Christmas.

Mr. Speaker, you know, what Albertans hired this government to do in part was to stop the NDP's ideological drive to shove left-wing politics into our classrooms. We will never let that happen. We are focused on tried, true, and tested teaching methods to turn around the decline in numeracy and literacy and, yes, dare I say, ensure that Alberta kids know a bit about their history and identity.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the teachers quoted in the news today made it very clear that they were cut out of the process and their feedback was not incorporated. They say that the curriculum isn't developmentally appropriate, let alone racially appropriate. "I wouldn't serve that to anyone, least of all these children I love and care about." This UCP curriculum has been overwhelmingly rejected by school boards, teachers, parents, education experts, and students. Who exactly does he expect will teach it, his own caucus? God forbid.

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know what? What the Grinch over there needs to understand is that we committed to an open and transparent process. The NDP wouldn't tell us who their left-wing ideologues were that were writing their politicized curriculum, a curriculum that said nothing about Canadian history, Alberta history, our military history, the rule of law, Confederation, a curriculum that saw constant declines in numeracy, in standardized test score outcomes. We are committed to patiently listening to teachers, parents, and experts to get this right. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, yesterday, when our Education critic asked the Premier why the Northwest Territories is now replacing Alberta's curriculum with B.C.'s, in a fit of hysteria the Premier shouted a number of rhetorical and inaccurate statements about the previous curriculum, but what he didn't do was explain why his was rejected. To the Premier. The Northwest Territories are replacing it because it does not adequately reflect the experience of Indigenous Canadians. Are they wrong? Is the Premier seriously telling the government of the Northwest Territories that he knows more about Indigenous education than they do?

Mr. Kenney: Well, I'm seriously telling the NDP leader that under her government the K to 6 curriculum included approximately 35 references to Indigenous people, culture, and languages, and the draft curriculum proposed by this government includes well over 300. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Outrageous.

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, I hope the NDP does have a good Christmas. I think most Albertans are going to be looking forward to celebrating the great economic news in this province, that we are leading Canada in economic growth, second in job growth, that we are turning around this province's finances, and that the future is looking bright.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre is the only one with the call.

Rural Health Care and Emergency Medical Services

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, what Albertans are getting from this government for Christmas is coal because this government has created a crisis in health care. Here's one example. In May of this year AHS was forced to close the long-term care facility in Galahad because they didn't have enough staff to keep the centre open safely. That's 18 seniors, some living with dementia, who were taken out of their homes, their communities, and scattered to other buildings and other towns. Now, the Health minister at the time said that he'd reopen it in four months' time. It's six months later. Can the Premier promise that he'll get these seniors back to their homes in Galahad for Christmas?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Well, thank you very much for the question and to the hon. member. As the hon. member knows, you know, the pandemic has impacted health care in every province in the country. We've had some temporary service reductions associated with this in terms of challenges with staff, and we continue to address these on an ongoing basis. We're looking at ways to get more health care professionals into rural areas and into areas where they're understaffed, including \$90 million that will be spent in terms of dealing with doctors in the province. As well, we're looking at other methods so that we can get more health care professionals out into the areas . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.
2:00

Mr. Shepherd: So no, Mr. Speaker. Those vulnerable seniors will be separated from their families on Christmas thanks to the UCP.

There are 24 communities in Alberta where hospitals have closed beds or cut services because of the UCP's ongoing war with doctors and nurses and other front-line health care professionals. Labour and delivery units have closed, forcing pregnant mothers to leave their communities to give birth. Some communities like Elk Point, McLennan, Barrhead, Hardisty have even seen their emergency room closed because there simply aren't enough staff. Can the Premier give his word to these Albertans that there will be no closures of their emergency rooms in Alberta hospitals over Christmas?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, many of the community hospitals to which the hon. member just referred would be unable to provide services altogether if the NDP were to shut those places down without any flexibility or patience with respect to a hard and immediate vaccine mandate. This government is taking the responsible decisions to encourage health care workers to do the right thing and get

vaccinated, but we will not shut down all of those rural hospitals despite the NDP's demand that we do so.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, this Premier's ideology and failure to act during COVID-19 did shut down those beds, those emergency departments, all of those for Albertans, and over the past two years we've seen wait times for ambulances grow longer and longer. The UCP's botched dispatch consolidation has led to huge gaps in coverage that are pushing EMS crews and firefighters to the breaking point. We've seen a frightening increase in the number of red alerts, thanks to this Premier, when there isn't a single ambulance available in the entire province for an Albertan in distress. Can the Premier give his word that there will be no red alerts over Christmas?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, as I acknowledged before, EMS is under pressure in Calgary, across the province, and this goes with other provinces as well. It's due to an unprecedented increase in calls, about 30 per cent, but I'm glad to see the latest data shows the pressure is starting to come down, but it remains a problem, and we're supporting AHS in responding to it. In Calgary there was a recent report of some red alerts, but I'm happy to report that code reds are down sharply in the latest quarter, September 30. In fact, they were down four quarters in a row. We're continuing to support AHS in providing EMS services across the province, and we'll continue to do so.

COVID-19 Response and Premier's Leadership

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, these are the facts. As the fourth wave crashed into Alberta, the Premier went away and seemingly left no one in charge. The Health minister vanished and left the Education minister in charge of the health care system. The Education minister did not address Albertans, and her calendar indicates she didn't do any work at all. Today we've also revealed the Finance minister barely worked either. He's supposed to be the number two and in charge when the Premier is away. His calendar indicates that he wasn't. Premier, a simple question. Was anyone working in your government while our health care system was pushed to the brink of collapse?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, the union-hour crowd cannot understand ministers who work seven days a week. She said that the former Health minister disappeared. If he disappeared, why was he on the phone multiple hours every day on briefings, on cabinet committees. . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The Premier.

Mr. Kenney: . . .speaking to officials? You know, the minister went so his kids could reconnect with family, maybe take a swim while he was working constantly. The NDP should learn that Albertans expect ministers to work seven days a week, not book off like they used to do, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Gray: Health care workers pulled double shifts while being attacked online by the Premier's staff, who were on a mission to discredit those with concerns about the fourth wave. The Premier's own former director of issues management posted online in June: "The pandemic is ending. Accept it." But it wasn't ending. Far from it. Instead, hundreds more Albertans died in the fourth wave, thousands got sick, tens of thousands had critical operations cancelled. Does the Premier regret his team telling Albertans the pandemic was ending when it clearly wasn't and jet-setting away, leaving Albertans to fend for themselves?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I can say that I certainly do regret that the Alberta NDP is the only political party in Canada that has sought to divide people from day one of COVID-19. It says all you need to know, just like their disrespectful screaming in this place, just like their defamation of Canadian citizens in this place. They have their Education critic who referred to Alberta as sewer rats. We respect what Albertans have done to come together to beat the fourth wave while emerging stronger than ever with economic growth.

Ms Gray: The Premier claims he was still in charge, and I honestly don't know what's worse. Either he fled the country and left no one in charge or he was still actively being briefed in Europe, and he chose to do nothing, nothing to stop the fourth wave from hammering our province so hard. Premier, Albertans are upset. Loved ones died, others suffered irreparable harm while waiting for an operating room. The fourth wave hit Alberta harder than any other province. Health care workers poured their hearts and souls into saving lives, and they didn't get a shred of support from this government. Tell them, tell each of them, why to this day you still don't take responsibility.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, \$3 billion last year and this in additional COVID contingency funding is a lot of support for our fantastic front-line health care workers. Alberta is below the Canadian COVID fatality rate on a per capita basis. We have, thanks to the diligence of Albertans, crushed this fourth wave. But we know why the NDP is so upset. It's because they didn't get the hard, relentless, permanent Australian-style lockdown they always wanted.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Mr. Kenney: We didn't keep the schools shut like they wanted, Mr. Speaker. We didn't shut all of the businesses for the past 20 months, and thank goodness they weren't in power to do so.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:06.

Economic Growth and Environmental Protection

Mr. Amery: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Laurentian elites and their perennial mouthpieces at the CBC are coming after Alberta yet again. Our state broadcaster, conveniently located in faraway Toronto, has been hyping up a recent poll that suggests that some Canadians would not be comfortable coming to Alberta because of fears that this province does not take climate change seriously. Given that Alberta's track record is a winning one when it comes to supporting leading-edge, emissions-reducing technology throughout our oil and gas sectors, can the Premier tell us about some of the recent initiatives in this space? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, another drive-by smear by the CBC, saying that some Canadians don't want to move here. They didn't ask how many Albertans want to go to Quebec or Ontario, but I can tell you this. This province – this province – is the most Canadian province because it has attracted more Canadians from coast to coast to come to this province over the past five decades, and you know why? The number one reason why is because of the energy industry, because of the prosperity, the jobs, the incomes, the opportunities that it has created. That is why Alberta's population has doubled over the past four decades, and we're back on track.

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, given that this province is on the precipice of an unprecedented economic boom and given that Alberta's recovery plan will position the province to lead in economic

development over the next year, creating well-paying jobs for young families, and given that multiple financial institutions across Canada have forecasted that Alberta will lead the nation in GDP growth this year, can the Premier tell the House what Alberta's government has done to secure the prosperity of this province for years to come?

Mr. Kenney: Well, I will, Mr. Speaker, but really fundamentally Alberta has been a magnet for hard-working people from across the country because of our low taxes, our quality of life, our economic prosperity, driven in large part by the energy industry that the CBC is attacking. You know, Quebec and the Atlantic provinces have hemorrhaged people for decades, but we don't get CBC articles about that. Instead, they're attacking this province, which has welcomed more Canadians than any other, supposedly for being an unwelcoming place. The CBC's job is supposed to support national unity, not to divide Canadians on regional grounds.

Mr. Amery: Given that Alberta has many qualities beyond just the oil industry, producing more barrels than ever, and a burgeoning tech industry, that has seen more investment than the NDP could have ever hoped or dreamt of, and given that the film industry in this province is currently filming the largest TV show in HBO history and given that there are many other nice-to-haves that young families are looking for when they decide to move to provinces such as our beautiful Rocky Mountains and our endless rolling prairies, can the Premier tell us some more about what these wonderful qualities are in this province?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, a Calgary home builder told me recently that he estimates a hundred families are moving to Calgary alone from Ontario every week right now because of the cost of living, the low taxes, the quality of life, the economic opportunity created in part by Alberta's recovery plan. We are projected to grow our population by 1.9 million people between now and 2046, leading the country in population growth. The Labour Mobility Act, the fairness for newcomers action plan: all of that designed to attract more new Albertans to help us build the prosperity of this province.

2:10

Health Care Workers

Ms Goehring: Mr. Speaker, like so many Albertans, I have been horrified to see our front-line health care heroes harassed and threatened while trying to do their jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Sometimes the personal attacks have come directly from government ministers or members of the government staff. Last week the MLA for Peace River accused health care workers of holding "a knife to the throat" of rural Alberta communities for trying to enforce a needed vaccine mandate among health care workers. Will the Minister of Health rise here and now and condemn this horrific statement from one of his own colleagues?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, we support health care workers and thank them for the tremendous work that they have been doing in terms of responding to the fourth wave and now the work they've been doing to be able to get up to 100 per cent on surgeries, and then we will catch up on surgeries. I've had extensive discussions with AHS, and we've worked together to resolve this issue in a pragmatic way that puts the interest of patients first. We supported AHS from the start in their decision to require staff to be vaccinated. That reflects the special responsibility of health care professionals to protect patients and the risks of COVID-19 to those patients.

Ms Goehring: Mr. Speaker, let's be clear that front-line health care workers in this province are heroes in every sense of the word.

Given that during the first and second waves, while Albertans were encouraged to work from home and only interact with members of their immediate family or household, these brave and dedicated individuals put themselves directly in the path of a deadly virus in order to care for others and save lives. Frankly, we owe front-line workers endless gratitude, and we should not be creating conditions where we subject them to further threats and hostility. What is this government doing to show that they truly support the mental health and well-being of these front-line heroes?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, we support our front-line workers, and we thank them. Also, our government thanks all Albertans for taking the measures and the REP, that we put forward in September by the chief medical officer of health, seriously and getting the numbers down. That's been an incredible system and has provided a huge relief on our health care system. We continue to support AHS's policy, including exemptions for those with valid religious or medical exemptions, and AHS has done tremendous work to get their staff vaccinated, and their success is a credit to their leadership. As of yesterday we had over 96 per cent of staff and over 99 per cent of physicians vaccinated.

Ms Goehring: Given that earlier today I along with the members for Edmonton-South and Edmonton-City Centre wrote to the Minister of Infrastructure and requested that he immediately initiate plans for a statue on the grounds of the Alberta Legislature in honour of Alberta's front-line health care heroes and given that this important project would commemorate the incredible sacrifice of these workers and make it clear that all members of this House support them in their important work and given that we have offered to help the minister with commissioning this important installation, and we did something similar for Alberta's amazing teachers in 2018, will the minister honour our request and erect a statue in honour of Alberta's health care heroes?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the members opposite for bringing that proposal. I will look into that. I'm not promising anything, but I agree that all members of this House join me in thanking our front-line health care workers, and the best honour to them is us not dividing Albertans but uniting Albertans and paying tribute to them in a meaningful way but not in a divisive way.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

South Edmonton Hospital Construction Project

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government claims to support Alberta's health care system, but the lack of actions from the Premier and the Health minister tells a different story. The residents in south Edmonton have been waiting decades for a new hospital on the south side. Our government promised it and was ready to deliver it; the UCP continues to delay. Will the Health minister tell us how much later this hospital will open due to his government's decisions and why he doesn't seem to care about the health and well-being of south Edmonton residents and those living in nearby communities?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, our government is focused on providing health for Albertans across the entire province, including in the cities of Calgary and Edmonton and rural areas. We have invested billions of dollars in terms of improved infrastructure to be able to provide those services. We continue to look at where those services are required and do assessments on an ongoing basis, and we will

continue to assess this site in south Edmonton and look at it as we move forward.

Mr. Deol: Given that the population of Edmonton south has been growing rapidly and this hospital has been needed for a long time but many of the residents in south Edmonton have to travel across the city to get the medical support they need but given that rather than invest, the UCP delayed this much-needed project and the only UCP MLA in Edmonton failed to fight for this critical project at the cabinet table, will the Justice minister apologize to his constituents and mine for failing to stand up for this critical and needed hospital in Edmonton south?

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. You know, I am proud of the work that this government does on behalf of Edmontonians and on behalf of the people of our province. We have invested billions of dollars in capital infrastructure, more than the NDP did while they were in office. We are, you know, building schools and roads and hospitals all across Edmonton. It doesn't matter where that particular constituency is, if it's south, southwest, you know, Edmonton-Meadows, all across our city.

Mr. Deol: Given that the Health minister is talking about the need to grow the capacity of our health care system after UCP incompetence nearly caused it to collapse and given that one easy way to build up capacity would be to build this hospital that has been long needed by the residents of south Edmonton but ignored by the UCP, if the Minister of Health was really interested and serious in building our health care capacity, can he commit to this House that he will go back to the cabinet table immediately and fight to get the south Edmonton hospital back on track?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, our government is focused on providing not only the health care services but the infrastructure to be able to provide those services to Albertans and Albertan patients across the province. Budget 2021 includes over \$3.4 billion over three years to provide ongoing infrastructure. As the hon. member knows, a number of these projects go through a number of phases, including a needs assessment. The needs assessment is being done on this particular project. We are focused on providing the infrastructure and the services that Albertan patients need.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has a question.

Tourism and Aviation Industry Support

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's tourism industry has been at the epicentre with respect to negative impacts of COVID-19, with operators and destination marketers consistently advocating for sectoral support. Closed borders, interprovincial restrictions, and health-related travel hesitancy have reduced tourism spending to single digits as a percentage of previous peaks. To the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation: can you please share with the House what measures you have taken to ensure that tourism operators can survive, revive, and thrive in the future?

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

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to that member. I want to thank him for all of his advocacy on behalf of all of the aviation industry here in the province of Alberta. In our last

budget we expanded the role of Travel Alberta and gave them an additional \$20 million towards their budget to expand the experience when people come here to travel to Alberta to experience the amazing vistas of our province and also to expand the roots of people flying to Alberta as well. In addition to that, throughout this pandemic we've provided hundreds of millions of dollars of supports to small businesses. We want to have a thriving aviation and tourism industry long term, and we thank them for all of their work throughout this pandemic.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that our airports and airlines have suffered devastating revenue losses throughout the pandemic and given the importance of our aviation hubs and air services to not just our visitor economy but to Albertans and the Alberta economy at large, can you also share what our government is doing to ensure the continued viability of the sector and our Alberta-headquartered airlines specifically as we focus on the restart and relaunch of regional, national, and international travel?

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

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're working with our airports to make sure that they're financially viable long term. In all of these tough times we've seen the entrepreneurial spirit of Alberta shine through. WestJet is expanding its routes. We're already seeing routes to Seattle, Amsterdam. We've seen Flair Airlines, a low-cost carrier based here in Edmonton that's expanding routes around the world. On top of that, we have a brand new airline in the city of Calgary, Lynx Air, that's hiring 450 people with their new headquarters in the city of Calgary. We're excited about the future of the airline industry here in the province of Alberta.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister for the great news. Given that investment in the future of Alberta tourism is key to relaunch and growth and given the natural assets we enjoy already, recognized around the world, and the great potential for Indigenous tourism development, to the same minister: how will you ensure that these opportunities are able to attract the capital and expertise that will be required to succeed on a highly competitive international stage?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Invest Alberta and Travel Alberta are working with businesses as well to attract investment to Alberta. I also want to highlight the innovation that's happening at the Edmonton International Airport. They're right now doing research and development on drone delivery. Again, Alberta leading the way when it comes to innovation, when it comes to the entrepreneurial spirit. That is what the future is going to be. We're going to carve our way forward. We're going to be there with those entrepreneurs for success long term.

Conversion Therapy

Member Irwin: Last week, in a historic moment, the House of Commons voted unanimously to ban the abusive practice of so-called conversion therapy. This came about due to years of advocacy from many survivors and experts across the country and here in Alberta, including those in the conversion therapy working group,

a group that the UCP shamefully disbanded. To date the UCP has shown absolutely no interest in banning conversion therapy, and there's been silence from them on this historic vote. I'm going to give them a chance now to go on the record. Does the Premier support the federal ban on conversion therapy, and does he unequivocally condemn this abusive practice?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. As the hon. member knows, the Criminal Code is a federal jurisdiction. As we've said before, the potential changes to the Criminal Code have been discussed. We will await the specific changes and co-ordinate with the federal government. As to Alberta's government let me be clear: conversion therapy is a banned practice in Alberta. No regulated health professional can provide it, and any business offering it would obviously be in potential violation of our Human Rights Act. This is a banned practice, and we support any government, like the federal government, who passes legislation this way. Just to be clear, conversion therapy is a banned practice in Alberta, and we do not support it.

Member Irwin: Let's try again. Given that in 2019 I asked the Minister of Finance about his ties to a board that advertised for Journey Canada with events that focused on praying the gay away and helping friends and caregivers to walk with those who are experiencing unwanted same-sex attraction and when I asked then, the minister didn't answer and he avoided all questions on this topic, I'm going to give that minister a chance to redeem himself here and now: does the Finance minister support the federal ban on conversion therapy, and does he unequivocally condemn this abusive practice?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, as previously indicated, there are various measures that have been enacted by municipalities in other provinces and including now the federal government. I respect any jurisdiction that chooses to take a position on this issue. In general Alberta and other Canadian jurisdictions are in the same place and of the same view. This is a banned practice, as it should be. Conversion therapy has no place in our province, let alone in our health care system. It's an abhorrent practice and long since discredited. I've never heard of it being done in Alberta and would encourage anyone with evidence to bring it down to the appropriate authority. Let's be clear. It is a banned practice in Alberta, and we support that policy.

Member Irwin: Given that one of the first acts of the UCP when elected was to be the first provincial government in Canada to roll back LGBTQ2S-plus rights – this horrible legislation Bill 8, Bill Hate, meant that kids across Alberta would have a very hard time accessing gay-straight alliances; we fought that bill hard, but the UCP, they refused to listen – and given that though the Education minister has shown time and time again that she is no ally, I want her to have a chance right now to be on the right side of history. Does the Education minister support the federal ban on conversion therapy, and does she unequivocally condemn this abusive practice?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, Alberta's government position is that conversion therapy is a banned practice in Alberta. This is banned, as it should be. It has no place in our province, let alone in our health care system. It's abhorrent and has long since been discredited. We support the federal government motion, as we do with other municipalities in terms of making laws about this. I just want to reiterate that it's a banned practice in our province and we support that policy.

Income Support Supplemental Benefits

Ms Renaud: People on income support have few assets, and they frequently present with barriers to employment such as disability and health conditions. The core income support Albertans with barriers for employment receive is \$866 a month. People on BFE used to be able to make it work because they received an additional \$300 in accommodation supplement. The UCP has cut supplemental benefits, housing subsidies, and now they're standing by and watching as Albertans sink further into poverty. Can the minister explain how cutting any income support for vulnerable Albertans could possibly be making their lives any better?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The opposition never stops selling them short, wanting to be negative in this House, but I'm going to share something positive here. Last Friday we added another \$2 million to expand access to inclusive postsecondary education so that students with developmental disabilities can pursue their educational goals. We will continue to work hard to make life better for vulnerable Albertans. [interjections]

The Speaker: Pardon me. I hope what I heard wasn't an unparliamentary heckle from that general area. [interjections] Order.

Ms Renaud: Given that the government provides information on social services through 211 and that publicly available data tells us that 211 has seen a 31 per cent increase in contacts over the past two years and given that the data tells us that the number of Albertans whose needs weren't met by the available government services has tripled since 2019 and given that these unmet needs include things like food, shelter, mental health supports, and these needs aren't being met because there's no available service, people can't afford the copay, or agencies are at capacity, what is this minister going to do immediately to improve life-saving services to Albertans? What are you doing to make life better?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's hear from real Albertans and stakeholders and what they say about our work. The student Jory Chan, who is a participant of the IPSE program, this is what he had to say: "For the longest time, I wanted to prolong my education through post-secondary but was never able to because of my disability. And then I found out about..." this inclusive postsecondary education program. It works like a miracle. We're taking action as we speak.

Ms Renaud: Given that this UCP government continues to deny that they cut anything when they deindexed income supports, AISH, seniors' benefits, and given that this UCP continues to claim that they did not cause any problems when they cut supplemental accommodation benefits for almost 3,000 Albertans, can the Minister of Community and Social Services tell the tens of thousands of Albertans that continue to struggle with poverty – these are real people – what you are doing to make life better? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. It's my hope... [interjections] Order.

Perhaps in the spring, when the galleries are open and the presence of the public is here, members will be better behaved. I'm certain no one in the public is impressed today.

The hon. the Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's hear from what this student from Mount Royal University says about our government, just with the announcement last Friday. This is a quote from Rachel Timmermans, students' union. "This program will help alleviate some barriers enabling Albertans to gain additional knowledge and skills valuable for employment and community involvement." The opposition can learn something from this student union representative and hop on the positive train here. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. It's embarrassing.

The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

2:30

Livestock Industry Support Supply Chain Disruption

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's livestock producers feed the world, they fuel our economy, and they contribute immeasurably to our proud western Canadian culture, but these past few years have been difficult for ranchers and livestock producers in Livingstone-Macleod and throughout southern Alberta. The drought and severe heat waves have heavily affected the livestock industry over this past year. To the minister of agriculture and forestry: what action did Alberta's government take to support ranchers and producers impacted by these dry conditions?

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On August 6 Alberta's government announced that we were making \$136 million available under an AgriRecovery program, the 2021 Canada-Alberta livestock feed initiative. This provided immediate payments of \$94 per head to help cover feed and water access costs for breeding stock across the province. So far we've received over 14,000 applications and provided more than \$187 million in support for Alberta ranchers. Over 98 per cent of applications were paid out by November 30. Applications for phase 2 will be available in early January. Taking a feed-need approach, a second payment of...

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

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and, through you, thank you to the minister. Given that the AgriRecovery cost is shared 60 per cent by the federal government and 40 per cent by the provincial government and given that Alberta made that \$136 million available to livestock producers prior to any AgriRecovery commitment from the federal government and given that this government is committed to standing up for the interests of our province within Confederation, again to the same minister: was Alberta's government able to push Ottawa to step up and to contribute their full \$204 million portion of the AgriRecovery funding?

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The short answer is yes, but a better word than "push" would be "led." We announced our \$136 million share of AgriRecovery on August 6. On August 15 the federal government responded to our call and confirmed that they would contribute their \$204 million share of AgriRecovery funding. This means a total of \$340 million in AgriRecovery for Alberta's ranchers.

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

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta's ag industry has already been severely affected by the pandemic, severe heat waves, and by droughts and given that supply chain issues have

caused extra pressure and uncertainty for those working not only in the livestock industry but in all industries throughout Alberta and given that it has further been impacted by the flooding in B.C., which has affected the lives of our neighbours and also vital supply chain networks such as highway 3, to the Minister of Transportation: can you please give us an update on how the disasters in B.C. are affecting supply chains for businesses and residents in southern Alberta?

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

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. CN and CP have restored services to some degree through the Kamloops to Vancouver corridor. The rail situation is still stabilizing, and we're closely monitoring it. On the trucking side, highways 1, 3, 5, 7, and 11 are all opening to varying degrees. We're continuing to monitor the situation closely to see if any further weather situations may impact trade routes here. It's important for us. We've been there on the ground in British Columbia working with them to solve these challenges, and we'll continue to do so.

Oil Well Site Reclamation and Liabilities

Ms Ganley: The liability for abandoned oil wells is a major concern from an environmental perspective, for landowners, and constitutes a heavy financial burden resting squarely on taxpayers. When the oil prices were low, this problem seemed insurmountable. Fortunately, prices are back up. We have the opportunity to both address the liability problem and create good, mortgage-paying jobs. Unfortunately, when the minister did an admittedly needed review, she didn't ask for more contributions at higher prices. Minister, you could have addressed the liability and created good jobs. Why didn't she?

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader and Minister of Environment and Parks.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you for that, Mr. Speaker. This government has invested significantly in cleaning up abandoned wells, creating thousands of jobs across the province. Another thing, though, that we have done was be able to fix the Surface Rights Board from the mess that the NDP made of it when they did not properly fund it, properly staff it while they abandoned landowners from every corner of this province. This government immediately took action, properly funded the Surface Rights Board, and made sure that property rights were protected, something that the NDP have been fighting against in this Chamber from the very first day that they arrived here.

Ms Ganley: Given that trickle-down economics doesn't work and that share buybacks don't help Albertans and given that I've heard from landowners who don't think the Surface Rights Board has been fixed at all and have been fighting for years to have abandoned well sites cleaned up, who are frustrated and worried about the health of their land and their families, and given that this government loves to crow about jobs created by a federal program to clean up oil wells, why would the minister forgo protecting landowners creating jobs when we don't know how long high prices will last?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of environment.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This side of the House will not take any lecture from a socialist when it comes to economics. I'll give you a couple of projects in the last few weeks

just on the environment side: 16 projects worth \$2 billion and 5,600 jobs, with \$176 million invested from ERA; another seven projects worth \$350 million and 2,240 jobs, with \$100 million invested from TIER; 23 projects worth \$169 million and 1,300 jobs, with \$50 million invested from TIER; and on and on. We created jobs. They're trying to shut the oil industry down. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Ganley: Given that the UCP have done everything they can to damage Alberta's environmental reputation and drive out investment but then finally recognize the importance of ESG factors and given that oil well liabilities create huge concerns for our financial and environmental future and given that prices have finally come back up and that Albertans are desperately in need of jobs, one last time, Minister: why did this UCP government not take the opportunity with higher oil prices to address this liability problem while we can?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, all I'll say is this. A sharp contrast – actually, let me say the answer to that question, that I'll give to this House. The new Dow petrochemical facility coming to Fort Saskatchewan will create billions and billions of dollars in GDP and thousands of jobs inside this province. That's real action. Despite the fact that the NDP still right now, even at this late hour in the session, are spending all their efforts trying to shut down the oil and gas industry, this side of the House will always fight for our largest industry inside this province. When will that member stand up and condemn her own membership for asking for illegally blockading pipelines? [interjections]

The Speaker: Okay. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford is about to ask a question, but here is what isn't going to happen. The member will ask a question, and then whoever answers it is not going to get shouted down by this House. Is that clear?

The hon. member.

Indigenous Relations

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have some simple, straightforward questions for the Minister of Indigenous Relations that come from Indigenous Albertans, that I hope he can answer directly. Can the minister please explain why he cut the funding for both Métis Calgary child and family and Métis Edmonton child and family, resulting in the loss of programs for the people they serve, including the loss of a daycare and six social workers and psychologists? Can the minister explain how the loss of support for children and families in our two largest cities supports Indigenous Albertans?

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

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wasn't aware of that program being cut, so I'll have to look into that, and I'll get back to the member as quickly as I can.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Feehan: Well, it's been over a year, so maybe you should catch up.

Given that in addition to these cuts hurting families, the actions and cuts of this minister have resulted in the loss of a support program designed to support the families of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in the court system and given that even though answering and addressing the report into missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls is the key to reconciliation, this government has been unacceptably slow when it comes to

enacting these calls to action, can the minister please explain how removing supports for the families of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls helps Alberta advance the cause of reconciliation?

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

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls file has been so important to me because it's so important to the families. I've been working with them and helping them get through this difficult time. I want to thank the panel for their hard work. They will be presenting their report to me before the end of the month here. The panel asked for more time, and I gave it to them because it is such an important issue for the families, and it is such a sensitive issue. We'll be getting the report very shortly. I just want to thank them for that labour of love, because they've told me that it has helped them, especially to start the healing process in their own lives.

2:40

Mr. Feehan: We'll pass that answer on to the unemployed court workers.

Given that when we were in government, we worked with Indigenous communities to enact programs to support them, their local economies and communities, but given that under this minister not a single new dollar has been added to crucial programs like Indigenous climate leadership and the First Nations regional drinking water tie-in program, a program that will create sustainable drinking water on reserves, and given that this minister won't even provide funding to help civil servants get better understanding of Indigenous culture and history, can the minister please tell me: who is benefiting from his cuts? It is certainly not the Indigenous community.

Mr. Wilson: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's that time again. We've got to break some hearts. We've added just recently another \$13 million to complete a water project for the Ermineskin First Nation. It's being worked on as we speak. Have I mentioned the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation? It's a billion-dollar program. A billion dollars. We're not talking about putting a few solar panels up on some houses but real projects creating thousands of jobs and hundreds of millions of dollars of investment into Alberta. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Statement by the Speaker

Alberta MLA Awards

The Speaker: A gold star for everyone: the first time in our time together in the 30th Legislature that we only made it to question 13. Job well done. You really have outshone yourselves. I feel like a dad who has a birthday present to give to a son or a daughter and they have been poorly behaved. All the same, I do have the 2021 MLA parliamentarian of the year awards, to be awarded on the day on which all parliamentarians behaved the poorest.

The most collegial MLA for 2021, as voted by your peers: the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows. The best community outreach MLA: the hon. Member for Calgary-Edgemont. The 2021 best debater: the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View. The most knowledgeable parliamentarian, a two-years-in-a-row winner: the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul. The best representative of constituents: the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross. The hardest working MLA: the MLA for Calgary-South East. The most promising newcomer – well, this will be the last year that this

award is awarded – is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. The lifetime achievement award is to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. And the 2021 MLA of the year, for the records: the MLA for Lethbridge-East.

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

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by Grande Prairie.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps next year will be my year to win most collegial MLA.

The Speaker: We can all hope.

Mr. Schmidt: I rise to present a petition containing almost 1,900 signatures of Albertans from across the province urging the Assembly “to help protect Alberta’s Rocky Mountains, including its river headwaters . . . by passing Bill 214, Eastern Slopes Protection Act, or a Bill that, if introduced in a subsequent Session, proposes legislative changes that achieve the same objectives.”

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie has a petition.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In accordance with Standing Order 86(2) I'd like to present this petition with approximately 375 signatures on behalf of my constituent Kirsten Tiegan. This petition was signed by residents from right across northwest Alberta urging “the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to revise the legislation around the distribution of electricity and rate calculations with a focus on equal access for all Albertans to electrical infrastructure.”

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis has a tabling.

Ms Rosin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table four documents today. I rise to table the requisite number of copies of notices given to four trails groups in my constituency notifying them of funds being given to them to maintain their continuous, amazing work of building and maintaining trails in Kananaskis Country. I have four copies of a notice of \$100,000 given to the Canmore and Area Mountain Bike Association. I have five copies of the notice given to the greater Bragg Creek Trails Association for \$250,000. I have five copies of the notice given to the Friends of Kananaskis for \$100,000 and five copies of the notice given to the Moose Mountain Bike Trail Society for \$100,000.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. members for Edmonton-Meadows, Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, and Central Peace-Notley. That will be the order.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I referred to, while debating, the Alberta NDP's call for changes to support low-income postsecondary learners. I have the requisite number of copies for tabling for the sake of the legislative record.

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

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have tablings here from a constituent who understood that they had COVID, which was

undiagnosed. They went to a clinic, had their blood serology taken prevaccination and then postvaccination. The constituent told me that at the clinic they were advised that they shouldn't have to take one after the postvaccination because it never records any higher than 80. The results showed 196. For the submission, I will also submit that this is my medical information. For the members opposite who question where I'm at: trust the science.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do have several tablings, so please bear with me. The first I have is from a constituent, 10-year-old Tawny Blake from Hines Creek, who sent a handwritten letter to me. I'll just read one part of it. "With masks you can't see people smile and I wish it could just go back to normal so we can see friends and family." Tawny's concern, of course, is with the mask mandate in schools.

I also have here a petition signed by many of my constituents and, actually, the Member for Peace River's constituents, too, I see, asking that vaccine mandates be forbidden. This petition was given to me to table in the House.

2:50

I also have here quite a stack of e-mails, and these e-mails were in response to the Leader of the Opposition's request for feedback on how COVID has affected Albertans' lives. I haven't seen any of these tabled so far by the NDP, so I will do so. Of course, some of these e-mails may not be, you know – some of them may cross the line in some of their comments. Of course, I think that's something that we must accept as members of this House, that we do have constituents that may use words and language that's maybe not appropriate for the Legislature. Obviously, this is how these people have felt, so I'll table these e-mails.

The Speaker: I might just mention I am providing a significant amount of liberty with respect to the tablings. I trust that you'll make your comments more concise.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will.

This is my last one. This is an article written by Rick Bell. It talks about the UCP Gabfest – The Premier Rocks. Just Ask Kenney's Crew. That's the last one.

Thank you.

The Speaker: I would also provide caution to the member that even if he's quoting a newspaper article, the use of proper names is unparliamentary and ought not happen.

Hon. members, we are at points of order. The hon. Deputy Government House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Remarks off the Record

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on a point of order that was called roughly around 2:05 today, during question period, under 23(h), (i), and (j). At the time the Premier was speaking, responding to a question from the opposition, when the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford yelled out in an erratic and extremely loud, unparliamentary voice: people died on your watch. The dead heard that comment; it was so loud and unparliamentary. I cannot believe that I'm sharing a Chamber with a member who would conduct himself with such a low level of decorum to say such a thing to the hon. Premier. We may disagree about what is being done in this Chamber or how we're addressing the public health crisis, but such comments are unparliamentary. It certainly creates disorder, and I

would encourage that member to not only retract and apologize but not to use that kind of language going forward.

The Speaker: I think that the Speaker has said plenty about decorum today. I am not going to hear the rest of this point of order. We are all well aware of how we have conducted ourselves in the Chamber today. I think the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo might have the opportunity to apologize. What I can say is that I didn't hear what the hon. member said. As such, since I didn't hear it, it's not a point of order. I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

We are at orders of the day . . .

Mr. Schow: I called two points of order today, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay. If you've got a second point of order, feel free to let it ride. I have a sense of what the ruling might be, but go ahead. I've been mistaken in the past.

Mr. Schow: Happy to withdraw, Mr. Speaker.

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

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 73

Infrastructure Accountability Act

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader has risen.

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, before we go into this, I'd like to ask for unanimous consent for one-minute bells for the afternoon sitting, including the first bell at Committee of the Whole.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to move third reading of Bill 73, the Infrastructure Accountability Act.

Thank you to all the hon. members who have spent time reviewing and considering this legislation and offering their insights and feedback. I appreciate how engaged the House is on this bill.

Infrastructure takes time to plan, design, and build. It requires resources to operate and maintain, and it is the government's responsibility to build projects Albertans need while being responsible stewards of the taxpayers' money. We need foresight. We must understand the forces shaping our role, the demographic and economic trends to which we must respond. To coin a phrase, we need to skate to where the puck is going. This legislation will give Albertans confidence that the government has both the immediate framework to address annual capital spending in the budget and a long-term vision for addressing the infrastructure needs of this province in the future.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

I would now like to address some of the critiques of the bill we have heard. Some say that we are legislating a process that already exists. There is truth to that, and the elements of these criteria have indeed been in use by previous governments to evaluate capital plan submissions. I would never suggest that the NDP simply threw darts to select their projects. The benefit to legislating the criteria is that

we are providing greater transparency to taxpayers and project proponents.

Let's look at one of these criteria, namely life cycle costs. We are making sure that full consideration of capital costs and operational costs are evaluated for both existing infrastructure and new project submissions. It's important that Treasury Board look not just at the price of building a school but at the cost of maintenance and upkeep for that school over the decades that it will serve Alberta students.

Another criteria is return on investment. Now, obviously, if we are evaluating a junior high school, the economic impacts are not front of mind nor easily measured. But if we are evaluating a new road that will allow Alberta goods to travel to markets hungry for our energy and agriculture and forestry products, it would be negligent not to consider the economic return.

Members opposite have also suggested that the bill's criteria aren't prescriptive enough. The level of detail provided is in keeping with other jurisdictions. They should make us, now and in the future, require flexibility in order to do their jobs effectively, and we will not add red tape by enumerating too many criteria or requiring that traditional criteria be set via an order in council, as the opposition proposed last night.

I would just like to comment briefly on some of the comments we heard last night, particularly from the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. Mr. Speaker, I was the critic for economic development and trade when I got elected in the beginning. And you know what? When the opposition today are feeling disappointed or disgraced that I didn't entertain their amendments, I feel a bit – I mean, how I felt: now I remember that. I can feel their frustration. But for that particular member, it was rich for him talking about Team Alberta, because as an opposition member I was doing my own outreach to trade missions overseas, visiting our own Alberta offices, and that government in power that day, the NDP government, wouldn't even allow trade representatives overseas paid by Alberta taxpayers to meet an elected official like me who was doing outreach on behalf of Albertans. That's frustrating.

Also, another comment: we only know how to tear down things. The example given was the Annex building. There was a cost-benefit analysis done, and we came to the conclusion that it's better to pull down that building because to refurbish and renew that building, to extend the life, would have cost Albertans millions and millions of dollars, which we could use on other new projects like schools and hospitals.

3:00

You know, I can give some examples, but getting back to the matter at hand, I would commit that if we add any additional criteria to select the projects in future, I would commit that whatever we use to evaluate future project submissions over and above the existing criteria legislated in this bill we will disclose them proactively online. That's my commitment. This bill was never intended to legislate the entire capital planning process. The act strikes a balance of increased transparency for Albertans while preserving the ability of Treasury Board and cabinet to engage in strategic decision-making around the capital plan in response to the fiscal realities of the day.

Some members have said that environmental considerations should be a criteria in the framework. The criteria on enhancing community resiliency does include this; however, it is unnecessary and poor legislative practice to put technical design requirements into a bill. These requirements have existed for years and are under perpetual review, revision, and refinement in response to industry best practices. To add a bit of a context, Mr. Speaker, 70 projects have been LEED certified since April 2019. We are building environmentally sound projects in every corner of this province

such as, you know, Windsong school in Airdrie, Kim Hung school in Edmonton, Fireside school in Cochrane. Those are some of the examples which were LEED certified silver.

I would also like to address concerns around how municipalities were consulted and engaged during our public outreach on the role of municipalities in this province's capital plan. During seven weeks in the summer of 2020 we heard from over 60 municipalities, including several written submissions from municipal organizations, who voiced support for the act, the criteria, and its objectives. I know that my colleague the hon. minister of labour went through a list of supportive groups and municipalities during the Committee of the Whole, so I'll leave it there. But for the opposition to suggest that municipalities have been left out of the process or that their voices aren't being heard doesn't ring true.

Let's be very clear. Municipal infrastructure grants are out of the scope of the act that we are discussing today, Mr. Speaker. Municipalities can continue to have the flexibility to evaluate their own infrastructure needs with whatever criteria they choose. In fact, the act does not legislate how any external organizations make their own capital planning decisions. Municipalities, postsecondary institutions, school boards, and other organizations will continue to have their own decision-making authority.

Frankly, I question why members opposite think that all municipalities have identical infrastructure priorities. They seem to think municipalities are some monolith. Even within council, for example, like your and my hometown, Mr. Speaker, of Calgary, not all members tend to agree on what the infrastructure priorities are in any given community. This bill does give municipalities the opportunity, however, to advocate for provincial projects that are important to their communities using the legislated criteria to make their case.

The opposition also mentioned working with the federal government. Leveraging federal funds does not happen within the confines of a capital plan, Mr. Speaker. It's a much larger conversation, one that is happening across ministries within specific grants and initiatives such as the investing in Canada plan programs like the disaster mitigation and adaptation fund, the gas tax fund, the municipal asset management program, the new building Canada fund, and the investing in Canada infrastructure program, or ICIP.

If you didn't know, Mr. Speaker, ICIP distributed \$3.66 billion back into our province. That was the money we sent to Ottawa. We got it back, and we invested that in small communities like Consort and also in our hometown, Alberta's largest city, Calgary. It's also brought much-needed funding for broadband Internet to communities like Cold Lake First Nation and Saddle Lake Cree, which brings us to the NDP's contention that the bill doesn't address Indigenous issues.

Bill 73 makes specific reference to resilient communities, which, of course, includes Indigenous communities. Not only that; it specifically refers to providing remote communities with core infrastructure and preserving or enhancing the community's culture and heritage. We will continue to partner with Indigenous communities on projects that improve economic security, access to digital services, broadband, and commerce.

I would like to discuss how this bill helps moderate individual bias. We can never fully remove bias because as humans we see the world through our own eyes, coloured by our own unique experiences and perspectives. However, we can put in a framework to help moderate it. This bill enshrines the deputy minister, the highest level of our provincial civil service, into a committee to provide information, advice, and recommendations to the political decision-makers, and it helps them to ensure that long-term priorities of our province do not get lost in the churn of the four-year election cycle. Creating clarity and transparency is never a bad

thing. Even if we assume it is obvious to everyday Albertans, Mr. Speaker, we will ensure that ministries and the ministers prioritize, collaborate, and align their capital planning submissions across departments to ensure the whole of government responds.

Finally, one thing I have been miffed by is that the opposition doesn't see the bill as an important part of economic recovery. Economic growth and job creation is about connecting the dots on how integral infrastructure is to any economy. Any effort such as this bill that contributes to greater transparency and accountability in the larger system creates the stability and confidence that every economy needs to thrive. When we have clarity and transparency around capital planning of our public infrastructure, including strong governance and a vision for the province, then Albertans, municipalities, investors all have confidence in this, and that grows their confidence as their government demonstrates the pivotal role infrastructure plays in Alberta.

I would like to quote, of all things, the Broadbent Institute. Members opposite are surely familiar with their work. The Broadbent Institute agrees with the Conference Board of Canada's research citing that in the short term GDP rises \$1.43 per every dollar of infrastructure spending, that 9.4 jobs are generated per million dollars spent, and 44 cents of each dollar spent by government is recovered in additional tax revenue. Over the long term the discounted present value of GDP generated per dollar of public infrastructure spending, which is written on in this, Mr. Speaker, lies between \$2.46 and \$3.83.

3:10

Yes, Mr. Speaker, infrastructure spending is important to the economy, but we shouldn't build bridges to nowhere for the sake of building. We need to make sure we are building the infrastructure most important to Albertans and Alberta's economy. In short, this bill is helping create greater certainty around capital planning in Alberta. Taxpayers are spending unprecedented amounts on capital projects. We know that building public infrastructure is a critical part of Alberta's economic recovery. They should know how the projects that government builds are evaluated. They should have certainty that we are looking ahead to the economic and demographic trends that will shape the province for years to come and are building projects in anticipation of those shifts. They should know that we are doing our utmost to remove politics from the process and getting the best advice available.

Mr. Speaker, this bill responds to a MacKinnon panel recommendation and was a platform commitment of this government. I'm proud of the great work done by the executive team at Alberta Infrastructure, the dedicated public servants who made this happen. I'm equally proud of the hard-working men and women across the province who build the roads, schools, hospitals, courthouses, and even this magnificent Legislature Building, the temple of democracy.

When I moved to Alberta, Mr. Speaker, it was because I knew I could provide for my wife and son a better life. Many, many new Canadians like me, you know, chose Alberta because of the economic opportunities, jobs, economic freedom, and, yes, world-class schools, hospitals, and other infrastructure.

As we continue to build our growing province, should this bill pass, Albertans can rest assured that an extra degree of transparency has been added to how their tax dollars are being spent. I hope all members will vote in favour of this bill and give Albertans the knowledge that their government is building the right projects for the right reasons.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you, I ask all members of this House to pass this bill so I can, once the bill is passed, also bring in the 20-year strategic capital plan, which will give, you know, a long-term view of the projects being planned and the criteria being

used to plan those projects, which will give more certainty and predictability for project selection criteria and also project funding. That's why I'm going to ask all the members of this House to please vote in favour of this bill and pass it.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Do I see anyone? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has risen to respond.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak to this bill. I want to start by commenting on the criteria that is within the bill and then some of the comments that the minister made as well. I think my concern for this bill is less about what's in it and more about what isn't. I appreciate the fact that this will put into legislation some clear criteria. I think the concern is that if you put into legislation clear criteria, you by definition exclude other things, and I think that there are some things that are missing from this list that ought to be in.

I think it's worth saying as well that with respect to the comments about working with the federal government and that that doesn't happen in the capital plan, respectfully, I beg to differ with the minister. I don't believe that that is the case. In fact, I believe that leveraging money coming from the federal government not only is a valid criteria but has been used in the past, so I am surprised to hear that the government would not be doing that at this time.

Another sort of major concern in terms of what isn't in this is regional municipal plans. Again, I appreciate that the government says: "Trust us. We'll still consider it. We'll still do it." But, I mean, I think that if ever there has been an illustration of a complete breakdown of trust, this afternoon was probably it. You know, I speak on behalf of phone calls and e-mails and direct messages and all sorts of things that I get from constituents continuously. We've probably had more e-mail in the last year in my office than in any previous year, and it is because of a lack of trust. Because the people I represent do not trust this government when they say, "Trust us," I cannot do it either. Now, I would be disinclined to do it in any event because I think their actions demonstrate a series of reasons not to trust them, but even were I inclined to do that, I do not think I could be that far offside the people in Calgary that I stand here to represent.

I don't think that "trust us" works, and particularly in this context, the context of regional municipal plans, I don't think that it works because for municipal leaders, some of whom had city charters that had been rolled out and then were taken away, some of whom had MSI commitments that were taken away, many of whom have suffered under cuts, have suffered under the downloading of policing costs, of cuts to policing funding – I could see why those folks wouldn't be inclined to just trust that the government would consider it even though it's not explicitly in the criteria.

Having said that, I mean, doesn't that completely defeat the purpose? The minister stands before this House and he tells us, "The point of this is transparency," but then, "Oh, don't worry that that's not in the transparent list that is now in legislation because we'll consider it anyway." Well, that completely defeats the purpose of the transparency. It also doesn't provide sufficient assurance that these regional municipal plans will be considered, and they are important things. I mean, it's exactly what we want. We want municipalities coming together to co-operate on what infrastructure they need so that not everybody has to build their own thing, so that it's more efficient from a spending point of view. That should be considered because it's important.

The next thing that's not in here that's worth talking about is Indigenous reconciliation. Now, I appreciate that the minister says, "Don't worry; it's in there under 4(f)," which says:

the extent to which the project or program is expected to enhance the resiliency of a community, including by . . .

- (iv) preserving or enhancing the community's [cultural] . . . heritage.

I don't deny that that will catch some of the same things as reconciliation, but I think we need to acknowledge, particularly in this place, that reconciliation is a separate issue. It is not just the culture of a community. That is certainly an important issue. That is certainly something that should be considered.

But reconciliation is more than that. Reconciliation is about repairing a relationship after one party has engaged in a fundamental breach of trust, and in this case that party is us. We have breached in many ways the commitments that we made to Indigenous people. Reconciliation means acknowledging that, it means apologizing, and it means working to make it better, not working to make it better in the way that we think is better but working to make it better in the way that our Indigenous partners feel makes it better.

I think that suggesting that Indigenous reconciliation can simply be subsumed in this concept of respecting the culture of a society just gets it wrong because, while that is an important concept, reconciliation is sort of an additional overarching principle that needs to be considered, specifically dealing with Indigenous people. I think there is a justice aspect, an aspect of making reparations for that which was done unjustly, that is not captured in the concept of enhancing culture that is captured in reconciliation, and that's why I feel it ought to be a separate criterion.

3:20

Mr. Speaker, in addition, emissions reduction: also a criterion not on this list. This is a huge piece of the puzzle. Emissions reduction in public buildings, in private buildings, in all sorts of places is absolutely critical. If you talk to experts from any side, in any country, working on any project, they will tell you that a piece of the net zero electricity grid puzzle is emissions reduction, that a piece of the net zero puzzle is emissions reduction. These are absolutely critical considerations, because in addition to changing the energy we use as more people the world over use more and more energy, we all need to use a little less. We can all use a little less in ways that don't impact our lives, and we can do that by being more efficient, by engaging in energy efficiency exercises. These are incredibly important pieces for the future. They are something that we need to be considering now, and we absolutely must address it to get to net zero. This is an issue that impacts directly on the future of our children.

I know that the members opposite love to talk about how deficits impact on the future of our children, but, Mr. Speaker, I don't think it can be stated clearly enough, especially after these past eight months and what's been going on in the world, that the devastating impacts of flooding and mudslides and heat waves and all sorts, that we know, despite what some members opposite would argue, to a level of scientific certainty that almost any standard would consider appropriate – I studied in psychology, and I believe the standard at that point for correlation was: the probability of this occurring by chance alone is less than 5 per cent. I mean, we're talking about incredibly rigorous scientific proof. The community has come together, the scientific community, and determined, like: yes; this is the standard, and we consider this proof. This is an issue that needs to be addressed. It's an issue that we need to do something about. It impacts directly on the future of every living thing on this planet, so I think that should be a criterion.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I think it's worth discussing this issue of the ministerial order with additional criteria. Now, one of the things we attempted to correct was to change that from a ministerial order to an order in council. It doesn't sound like a massive change, right?

It sounds like: okay; instead of the minister saying it, all of the ministers get together in cabinet, and they all say it together. The primary difference between a ministerial order and an order in council is that an order in council is required to be published at a certain time in a certain way. Ministerial orders don't have that.

I appreciate that the minister has taken the time to listen to the comments that my colleagues and I have made and to say: don't worry; they will publish any additional criteria. But, again, Mr. Speaker, this isn't about the minister himself; it's about this government as a whole. Even were I inclined to simply take his word, which I think I could not owing simply to historical evidence of the behaviour of this government in general, I couldn't because, again, we get hundreds of messages a week from constituents who have different issues, issues all across the board, different types of issues, but most of them have as an element a lack of trust in this government. Most of them have as an element the fact that they have simply lost faith that this UCP government will do the things that it says it will do.

Mr. Speaker, I think I continue to be concerned. The minister saying that he will do it is a good thing. I hope he will. I plan to hold him to that, but I think it's insufficient, and I certainly think that it would be better to have a legal requirement to publish. What do they say? Good fences make good neighbours, right? Sometimes it's good just to have the rules in place. Then everybody knows what the field is, and nobody has to sort of disagree about what "reasonable" is, which is, incidentally, sort of the purpose of most of the civil law court jurisdiction – right? – people disagreeing over what is reasonable in a particular set of circumstances. Yes, I guess, at the end of the day, what I'm saying is that I would much prefer a legal requirement to publish.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I think it's worth sort of talking about some of the collateral comments made around this bill about how more things are going to get built because P3 is in this and that. I think we've had a good back and forth across the aisle. It continues to be my belief that when we are talking about government funds, having that certainty that it's going to be done right or at least – I mean, one can never have a hundred per cent certainty on anything, but having a higher rate of certainty, a higher consideration of certainty in terms of things going right, I think, is better.

I think, you know, the point of P3s – and I had an excellent exchange with my hon. colleague for Lethbridge-East around this, that sometimes the bid will come in slightly lower because the liability is sort of resting on the payer, the government in this case. In instances where it wouldn't, perhaps that's true. I think what analyzing the historical evidence of the way this has played out would suggest is that in most cases it winds up costing more, because anything that goes wrong, anything which is unforeseeable – and if anybody has ever had construction done on anything in their home, something almost always goes wrong. That additional cost passes on to the taxpayer whereas any hope of profit goes to the private company. I think there's a mismatch. I think there's a mismatch between who bears the hope of profit and he who has the risk of liability. That is the reason that I don't know that this is necessarily the best way forward. I also don't see that addressed anywhere in here, in the criteria.

Now, one of the things that's also worth bringing up again, which I spoke about previously on this bill, is that these criteria are not that clear. Like, certainly, it adds the fact that the criteria are in legislation, but I don't think it's super well defined. It kind of leaves me with this sense of, like: kind of what's the point, right? Those are the concerns that I continue to have about this bill.

I think that in principle there are good things about it, right? In principle, there are good things about the idea of having these criteria outlined in legislation. I think the disagreement we're

having is over which criteria have been included. Again, I think the exclusion of a number of criteria – regional and municipal plans, Indigenous reconciliation, and emissions reduction in particular – is of significant concern to me. If you outline a list – and this is a principle of statutory interpretation, right? – a closed list, the Legislature is presumed to have intentionally excluded those things which are not included. When this is interpreted, it will be presumed that these were things that were intentionally included and that the government ought not consider them, and I think that's very sad.

3:30

I think also that this issue with respect to the order in council thing is – I'm just going to give an example. I'm not suggesting that this is going to happen. They could literally insert as a criteria, with no legal requirement to publish, the Premier's pet project. That could be a criteria that gets put into this bill, and no one would ever know about it. I think that's problematic. I mean, I hope it's certainly not something that's ever actually going to happen, but the fact that the legislation sort of leaves an open window for that is a concern, and I think it should be a concern for everyone.

That being said, again, I think the intent of this bill is good. I think it would be better if the conversation we had had going back and forth had been a little bit more fruitful. Again, trust, which I think has been broken between this UCP government and the people of this province, needs sort of steps forward to heal, and I think that they were provided with the opportunity to take some of those steps, to publish any additional criteria by OC, to alter the criteria to explicitly include Indigenous reconciliation, which I think I have argued quite clearly is a different and additional concept over and above the idea of "preserving or enhancing the community's culture and heritage." I think that reconciliation is a different concept than that.

Emissions reduction is another big one because we have to do it, and the sooner the better, right? The sooner we start, the easier the turn.

Those are my remaining concerns. I know we're at third reading here, but I think I will put those on the record.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will say thank you very much for the opportunity to address this bill.

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

Just prior to seeing the next speaker, I will mention that it has been noted by a few members in this Assembly that there was perhaps the detection of a smell of some sort of gas odour. I just want to reiterate to everybody that maintenance is looking into it currently. If we have to change course or take any actions with regard to the schedule, we will. Likely what has happened is that there was a refill with regard to a propane truck at the side of the building. I have asked a few people, and it does seem as though many of the people who have noticed it are also noticing that it's dissipating as well. I'm getting the thumbs up on that, too, so at this stage if we do have to take any further action or anything like that, we will.

Mr. Eggen: Maybe if I could ask, Mr. Speaker, if we could just keep that door open as well. This one. Then it'll help because it's concentrating in here. If the government side could maybe keep that door open, that'd be cool.

The Acting Speaker: Sure. If that helps to clear it, too, then that would be great.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah, it'll help, guaranteed.

The Acting Speaker: We will do that.

Now I see the hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's appropriate, I guess, that we just had that little interruption. It's quite fitting seeing as we're talking about infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, I didn't plan on speaking in third reading, but I just have so much respect for our Minister of Infrastructure. Not only is he someone with competence within the stewardship that he is assigned, but I believe that he is a principled and good person. The Infrastructure Accountability Act, I think, is in furtherance of the government's desire to ensure that our infrastructure priorities are based on merit and need and try to use principles.

I really appreciate the comments of the Member for Calgary-Mountain View. I appreciate her nuance and her civility in addressing many things in her role as a member of the opposition. I did listen to her comments. One thought that I had in respect of some of the concerns that she had – I'll just speak briefly about emissions reductions. Indeed, that is something that I think everyone in this House, all members, can agree upon. It's an objective that we all have. But it's important that we don't confuse the "how" of how we do an infrastructure project with the "what," and this act really focuses on the "what."

You know, in many areas within our province we have a growing population and many diverse and important needs. Of course, we don't have infinite taxpayer dollars, and it's really important that as government we are stewards of taxpayer dollars and that we spend those dollars where we can generate and produce the greatest public benefit.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to provide an example of how this Infrastructure Accountability Act may lead to better decision-making in the future, because that's really what I think we all desire. I am going to talk about accountability. AHS, of course, our health infrastructure, is probably not only, in fairness, one of if not the most important infrastructure priorities but certainly in many respects our most expensive infrastructure priority. Of course, with a growing population, with an aging population with many unique needs, with a COVID pandemic, the wise allocation of infrastructure priorities and resources in the area of health is such an important thing to do as well as possible.

I represent Red Deer-South, and in my constituency is the Red Deer regional hospital. I won't go into a long history, but the Red Deer regional hospital is a unique hospital in that it deals with and provides acute-care services. There are really great hospitals in surrounding areas, but if you have a profound, serious medical issue, those services are accessible only through the Red Deer regional hospital. In terms of acute health care needs the catchment population of the hospital is about 300,000 individuals, by some estimates 400,000.

One of the issues that came to my attention, certainly, as I was informing myself, seeking to serve my community as best as I can, is that probably the most important local priority in terms of Red Deer – the businesses and families and individuals – other than sort of the macroeconomic issues, was the underinvestment in the hospital. In 2017, in response to a systemic issue of government neglect – I don't want to use this opportunity to disparage the NDP; it was not only the NDP but prior governments who underinvested in the hospital – a group of citizens formed the Society for Hospital Expansion in Central Alberta. It is a nonprofit society of volunteers.

These individuals did something that I really respect and appreciate. Part of having accountability is that we need to make sure that we have equity in respect of our spending, that we treat areas of the province in a fair and balanced manner. Now, of course, Mr. Speaker, we will never achieve perfect equity because there is some subjectivity to that. The society, in short SHECA, found that data obtained from AHS indicated that during a 10-year period Calgary received \$2.5 billion; Edmonton, \$1.4 billion. Central

Alberta, with \$107 million for health care infrastructure, was significantly the lowest of any area of the province versus an average for the rest of the province at about 10 times that amount.

3:40

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'm not intending to disparage past governments. Really, with the desire to look forward, to be better in the future, I appreciate there being an Infrastructure Accountability Act. We don't want to see unprincipled governments vote-bribing, who do not prioritize fairness. You know, when we kind of talk about dollars, that's fine, but as it relates to health care infrastructure, when we have underinvestment in infrastructure in some areas of the province versus others, what that results in is unequal treatment abilities and sometimes medical emergencies in some areas of the province versus others.

Now, again, Mr. Speaker, I am not saying that we will ever achieve perfect equity, for example, with Edmonton and Calgary. In fairness, they are larger populations. From an economies-of-scale perspective, there will be some services, frankly, just from a sustainability perspective, that will only be available in larger hospitals, just like the Red Deer regional hospital. It is an acute-care hospital. Just from a sustainability and resource allocation issue, not all of the surrounding hospitals in central Alberta can be acute-care hospitals with the degree of services that Red Deer has, but we want to try and achieve equity to the best extent possible.

Mr. Speaker, I know that the Infrastructure Accountability Act has good principles, and I appreciate them. As the Member for Calgary-Mountain View properly pointed out, good principles are important, but even with good principles it is important to have principled, good individuals applying the principles. You know, when we have rules – rules are very helpful. They provide guardrails, but it's important that in our hearts we try and seek to be principled and fair and make our priorities based on merit and need. Part of that is how we weight the different principles. We list the number of criteria and principles, which are good principles and criteria, but how we weight them in terms of merit and need is a subjective decision. It's a decision of the heart and soul.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, what I can say is that as it relates to the Minister of Infrastructure, I believe he is a principled man. He is an individual who seeks for fairness and equity to serve the public interests of Albertans, and I certainly support this act passing in third reading and having him apply that, with the hope and trust that – of course, all of our roles here in the Legislature are temporary. His successor and future successors, who will have the important stewardship that my friend has: I hope that for the good of Alberta, the public interest, they likewise apply the good principles in this act in a fair and equitable manner.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I finish. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Next, I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows has risen.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak to Bill 73, Infrastructure Accountability Act. I believe this will be one of my last chances to speak to this bill, and I will keep my comments short and brief. I understand that there are many more of my colleagues who want to add their comments to this bill. When it comes to increasing transparency, accountability around anything, infrastructure planning and spending public dollars, we welcome it.

We have spoken to this bill in first, second – and now we are in third reading – and Committee of the Whole. We talked about the flaws in this bill, that the government claims they are codifying some of the criteria, some of the procedures and the processes that government departments already follow in decision-making around

the projects. There have been substantial flaws and gaps that the government's own summary document – I quoted from this last night. What the government document says Albertans were looking for from them is missing in this piece of legislation. The government or the ministry, when proposing this bill, failed to address the commonly used practice of asking municipalities or taking into consideration the municipal plans while decision-making. This is excluded from one of the rejection criteria.

The biggest part that is concerning to me was that the government failed to acknowledge the importance to address Indigenous issues and any seriousness of the government or understanding of the government towards Indigenous reconciliation when it comes to the capital plans.

Mr. Speaker, I have heard in this House today and I'm hearing this for the past two and a half years and I hear from different parts of the country, from different politicians talking about the investment under the funding stream of capital dollars into improving the drinking water in those nations. Let me say this. It is very hard to explain and find the words of how disgraceful and disappointing this is. We're talking about just to address only the very drinking water needs in countries like Canada. I'm not saying that this is this government's problem only. We call ourselves one of the superpowers and one of the developed places in the world, and then we brag about our willingness and our commitment to what issues we're trying to address.

Visiting rural communities and Indigenous communities has been my passion in the past. I've taken a number of guests and dignitaries, journalists, or politicians from abroad to the rural areas. Just drive 20 minutes away from the city, and you will find the gaps. If you're in the same country, if you're in the same place, in the rural models you will not find these so-called big, multinational restaurants, stores. The whole world changes.

3:50

When we're addressing these issues and addressing this piece of legislation, I'm not saying that everything is this Infrastructure minister's fault, but being a creative opposition, we're trying to provide positive feedback. This is the time when we're just spending this very House's important time around those issues, and we're taking the work in hand to discuss those and address those issues so it can come together, so we can strengthen the piece of work that we are working on to show your commitment to address those issues. That is the background. Albertans are looking to us, and they want answers.

I have raised this concern based on my feedback many times. The project, like, \$1.3 billion: it is not a political statement. The government failed to provide any report, any assessment report, or any documents in their decision-making. Albertans and my constituents want to see how this bill will bring transparency and accountability toward those kinds of decision-making going forward in the future.

As I said in my opening remarks, any transparency and accountability is welcomed, and we support it. I'm very sure we can do more and we can do much better, and it is definitely incumbent on this government and this ministry because they're the ones that hold a majority in this House.

With that, I will conclude my remarks, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Next I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has risen.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to third reading of this bill. There are a number of

points that I'd like to make around this bill, and then I'd like to respond to some comments that the Minister of Infrastructure made earlier, which I don't understand how they have to do with this bill on infrastructure, about a request that he had made when I was minister of economic development and trade as far as trade missions that he was hoping to engage on as a member of the opposition.

But to this bill, first and foremost, Mr. Speaker, I think, as the minister acknowledged, codifying a process that has existed but is now going to be put in legislation, we feel is a positive step forward. You know, I appreciate members of the government backbench claiming that this will take political decisions out of projects. Unfortunately, it won't. There's still going to be an ability for cabinet to move projects up and down the priority list. Now, truth be told, I don't think any government would handcuff themselves and not allow some flexibility, recognizing that sometimes projects – there's a sense of urgency to some.

Having said that, I also completely understand and respect municipal leaders – and I was a Minister of Municipal Affairs for about six months – where their frustration is that their projects and their priorities go on a list, off a list, on a list, off a list, depending on the whim of government of the day. That's a comment directed at every government, quite frankly. So if there is a way to provide some consistency, then I think municipal leaders would be appreciative. What's disappointing in this bill is that there is no requirement for the minister or cabinet to look at the priorities of municipalities. I think part of the challenge that many Albertans feel is that there's such a division or a gap between what their local elected leaders are doing, what the province is doing, and what the feds are doing, you know?

I know the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation talks about Team Alberta. Well, this bill would have been one of the ways, one of the tools to help deliver on that. So why not legislate a process that ensures that municipal leaders and their priorities are captured or reflected in conversation with the province? As it is, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the fact that municipalities exist because of provincial legislation; however, governments need to do everything they can to remove barriers and to change the nature of the relationship from a paternalistic, parental: we'll tell you what to spend your money on or what our priorities are regardless of if they align with yours.

It was disappointing that this government did not look to incorporate amendments looking at how, when it comes to infrastructure, we can try to do a better job, we as the province, aligning with municipal leaders and regional leaders. If we're talking about regional economic development where infrastructure is needed, this would have been a great place to see that.

As well, Mr. Speaker, I personally wish that we would have seen an acknowledgement around barriers and challenges of the existing procurement system. When we talk about infrastructure, there are barriers. There are challenges. There are a lot of companies, small and medium-sized, that feel frustrated that they struggle to get on the list. Government often goes back to their preferred vendors, and that exists as well for construction, which leaves out a lot of Alberta smaller companies.

You know, one great example is when governments went to build dozens of schools province-wide and put that out as a single tender. Well, how many construction companies can build 24 schools at the same time around the province? You've limited the number of companies that can bid on projects like that. I think it's going to take some political will and will take some creativity, but I think there's huge opportunity to ensure that the dollars that government spends go to our own small and medium-sized businesses.

As well, I wish there would have been some talk in this piece of legislation around innovation and encouraging, incentivizing innovative solutions to existing challenges, whether that's within

new builds or infrastructure builds, looking at how we can increase the GHG environmental footprint of our buildings. Can we raise our standards? I know that a lot of companies do build above and beyond what is required, but, you know, by raising the bar, it'll ensure that new developments are in fact being made to the utmost top standards.

You know, Mr. Speaker, my other area – and maybe it doesn't fit necessarily with this bill. The fact of the matter is that we have Alberta's major oil sands players all committing to net zero by 2050, and we've heard crickets from this government on any type of support that they will need to help them reach those goals. This is something that we should be bragging about and celebrating, that our companies have taken such bold action, but we know that they're going to need support from the province and from the federal government. It's extremely disappointing that this current government has not said anything about our major oil sands companies taking on this initiative.

You know, Mr. Speaker, the other comments that I'll make about this bill is that this comes also at the same time that MSI is coming to a close. The government has ended MSI, which municipalities rely heavily on to fund their priorities, right? The government has lots of different pools of money that it can give, whether it's for water or waste water. Those are specific and targeted. MSI was a brilliant vehicle, where municipal leaders were able to determine where that money would go and what their priorities were. At the same time, we've seen this government download costs onto municipalities such as policing, which we know is a major issue for municipalities.

4:00

You know, this bill is a positive step forward, which is why I'll be supporting it, but it's important that Albertans know and understand the full picture of other actions this government has taken.

Initially I was going to respond to comments the minister made about trade, but it just seems so out of place on a bill debating infrastructure. I'm happy to have a conversation with the minister about decisions from years ago and why that was.

But for the purpose of this bill, Mr. Speaker, I've had the opportunity to speak to it a couple of times. I think I've been fairly clear with my comments on it. With that, I will take my seat.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to join debate?

Then I will offer the hon. Minister of Infrastructure the opportunity to close debate.

Mr. Panda: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank all members of this House again for their input. I heard comments from my good friend the MLA for Red Deer-South. That puts a lot of pressure on me to live up to everybody's expectations on setting performance metrics for our own team. But I also want to assure members opposite that all their input is taken in the right spirit. I never claimed this bill is perfect, but there is always scope for improvement. I will definitely talk to them on their concerns. My door will be open.

Particularly when the previous speaker just concluded his remarks about his concerns about procurement, I understand, but this bill is not about, you know, selecting the procurement criteria. Knowing well that he was the former minister of economic development, he knows about all the trade deals Alberta has signed. Within the confines of those interprovincial and international trade deals, we are obligated – we're trying to keep the work more local. But the member's point is well taken. Our Premier also talked to

other Premiers to try and keep the work local, to keep the local skilled trades.

What our government did during the pandemic is expedite the procurement. We cut down, you know, the bid-evaluate-award process by a few weeks so we can get contracts out sooner, so Alberta's skilled trades are put to work sooner. That's one thing we did. There are certain threshold limits below which government has the flexibility to offer work by invitation criteria. It's \$100,000 for consulting services and supply of goods. We are using that flexibility in smaller communities to expedite the procurement and also offer that work to the local contractors.

The member opposite also talked about building 24 schools in one bundle. That didn't happen, but there is a P3 bundle that's in the market right now. That was one of our campaign commitments. We said that we'll aggressively pursue public-private partnerships to build public infrastructure faster and cheaper and also include future maintenance and innovation in the design. That we are following. So far we were only successful in awarding one bundle of high schools. There also we're trying to creatively keep the work mostly through the local subcontractors.

All the points are well taken. As I said, this bill is not perfect, but we'll do our best to maximize the benefits for Albertans in terms of transparency and predictability. That's the intent of this bill.

With that, I want to thank everyone again. This is my first bill. This is the only bill. I was not drawn even in the private draw during my opposition days, and as a minister of the Crown I feel honoured to present this bill. I want to thank every member of this House for their input and for their support in passing this and also, in future, for their support in implementing every aspect of this bill. If you have concerns, please do write to me or call me. I believe there's always scope for improvement, and I'm open to their continuous input.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. members.

[Motion carried; Bill 73 read a third time]

Bill 80

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

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move third reading of Bill 80, the Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2021 (No. 2).

Bill 80 represents our next steps towards making Alberta the freest and fastest moving economy in North America. It addresses three key themes of red tape reduction: economic growth and job creation, smart regulation, and improving government service delivery. If this legislation is passed, job creators and Albertans will see the removal of unnecessary restrictions acting as barriers to economic growth. It will lead to more economic opportunities for small businesses, faster and more efficient review of human rights complaints, and more flexible oversight of Alberta's credit union and insurance industry.

For example, Bill 80 will enable municipalities to establish entertainment districts, which have the potential to revitalize communities, promote tourism, and support small and local businesses. It will also support licensed cannabis retailers by allowing them to expand their businesses online, giving consumers more choice while still focusing on the safety of youth.

We are also making changes to the Income and Employment Supports Act, which will ensure that adult learners applying for financial assistance will be assessed under the Student Financial

Assistance Act. Students will benefit from the new, simplified eligibility criteria under the act, including streamlined application processes and reduced barriers for Indigenous students and sponsored immigrants. They're also expected to benefit from reduced processing times, in particular from eight weeks to one to three days, and the number of clients is expected to decrease from 46,000 to 10,000 per year.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Another great example of how this bill will benefit Albertans can be seen through the amendments to the Alberta Human Rights Act, which will allow Albertans who bring or respond to complaints with the Alberta Human Rights Commission to file their documents electronically, leading to time and cost savings. These amendments will also remove unnecessary layers and interim steps in the complaint process and allow the commission to use faster and less formal ways of reviewing and hearing complaints while reducing backlogs and wait times. The Member for Calgary-Mountain View asked if the human rights commissioner supported these changes. Yes. He was the one that brought forward the recommended changes after engaging with stakeholders.

These are just a few examples of how Bill 80 is cutting red tape and making life better for Albertans.

Now, Mr. Speaker, regarding the debate on the legislation so far I look forward to addressing some of these points made by the members in this House. I want to start by addressing the critical role that red tape reduction has in Alberta's recovery plan. We heard loud and clear that Alberta businesses and potential investors were concerned with the increasing barriers they faced in our province.

4:10

The members opposite have proven and even stated time and time again that they don't believe red tape reduction is important to Albertans and businesses across the province. In fact, the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar stated that our efforts to reduce red tape are "meaningless," "a waste of time," and "a pointless exercise." Now, this shouldn't come as a surprise given the NDP's record of failing on red tape reduction. Mr. Speaker, we know how important a streamlined and competitive regulatory system is when it comes to supporting local businesses and attracting new investment, and we know the member's comments are false.

But the members opposite don't need to believe me. In regard to Bill 80 Cherie Klassen, the chair of the Edmonton business improvement areas, said:

On behalf of Edmonton's 13 business improvement areas ... representing over 4,500 businesses on main street districts in Edmonton, we are pleased to see enabling legislation for the creation of entertainment districts. Entertainment districts have the potential to attract and support tourism, and create positive economic spinoffs for surrounding businesses. We look forward to working with the province, City of Edmonton and other stakeholders to create unique spaces that promote our local businesses and entertainment industry.

Tim McMillan, the president and chief executive officer of the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, said:

CAPP continues to support measures to reduce red tape and enhance efficiencies for government and the upstream oil and natural gas sector. The proposed changes would allow responsible parties, in certain circumstances, to step in and protect the joint interests of government and industry by ensuring that lease agreements are appropriately maintained.

What about other initiatives we've completed over the last year? For example, our government amended legislation and associated regulations to improve access to adoption information and improve

accountability for adoption agencies. Sheryl Proulx, the executive director of Adoption Options, said:

Both prospective adoptive parents and birth parents need to know they are in safe hands with the adoption agency they choose to represent them. These changes will help make . . . Albertans have the information they need to make the best choice for them.

There's the elimination of the Alberta Indian tax exemption card, which removed redundant red tape for over 100,000 Indigenous peoples. Ken Alook, a member of council of the Bigstone Cree Nation, said:

We are grateful to Minister Wilson and the Alberta government for eliminating the AITE card. We felt the old card was discriminatory and we are thankful to have an ally in the province.

This upholds our treaty rights and we appreciate this step forward.

Does the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar think these changes are meaningless, a waste of time, and a pointless exercise? I would hope not.

Then we have the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, who doesn't think we are cutting enough and has concerns about government adding regulation. But here's the thing, Mr. Speaker. There is such a thing as good regulation, for example, legislation that enables the establishment of a regulatory framework for brand new industries looking to grow and expand right here in Alberta. The Mineral Resource Development Act is a great example, which just passed through this House, as it adds regulations but enables entirely new industries and creates the stability and confidence that investors need. With no specific resource conservation statutes to help guide the responsible development of metallic and industrial metals, we are missing out on an opportunity that would diversify our economy and create jobs for Albertans. Red tape reduction aids and assists in diversification. Maybe the members opposite don't like diversification, but we do. Take, for example, lithium for electric car batteries, or how about geothermal energy as a third renewable?

Another example of an initiative that added new regs but cut red tape is the digital regulatory assurance system, which will shift industry away from multiple independent and outdated information systems to one single consolidated digital system for regulatory applications, approvals, and long-term environmental monitoring, saving industry time and money while ensuring Albertans' high environmental standards are maintained. Water Act approvals that used to take 160 days on average now take an average of 87 days.

The members opposite had four years to fix our regulatory system, and they did nothing, so I find it rich that they are now concerned about new regs. However, I'm happy to inform the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview that to date our government has eliminated four regulatory requirements for every one created, and we continue to work hard to cut red tape by one-third. If he's still concerned about Alberta's regulatory count, I would encourage him to go to our website, where he can submit his ideas on how we can continue to cut red tape.

Mr. Speaker, a number of the members opposite focused their comments on amendments to the Income and Employment Supports Act. To echo what the Minister of Advanced Education already shared, these amendments are making it easier for students to apply for assistance, not cutting support. The amendments are not eliminating financial assistance. The NDP are making things up. As I mentioned earlier, these changes are focused on streamlining the application process for students who are expected to benefit from reduced processing times. I'm not sure why the members opposite continue to oppose changes that will make it easier for students to access financial assistance.

I also want to take a moment to address the comments made by the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat. He had indicated that the

five red tape bills have only eliminated 3,300 unnecessary requirements. Mr. Speaker, our red tape reduction bills have eliminated a total of 123,000 regulatory requirements. However, only about 5 per cent of requirements are in legislation. The vast majority of red tape reductions are not changed through legislation. It's unfortunate that the member opposite doesn't know that. I mean, he's been a member in this House far longer than I have. It's unfortunate that he doesn't know that or that he does know that but chose to omit that from his comments. To date our red tape reduction efforts, again, have led to an 18.5 per cent reduction in regulatory requirements, or more than 123,000 regulatory requirements. This adds up to more than \$1.2 billion dollars in savings for Albertans and Alberta businesses, and that doesn't include the amount of time they are saving as we streamline processes and remove unnecessary or redundant barriers.

Also, I want to address some of the comments made by the Member for Edmonton-Decore, who claimed that our red tape reduction efforts don't support small businesses. That couldn't be further from the truth. The bill before us has changes that support thousands of small businesses across the province, which the member failed to recognize. Entertainment districts will support small businesses and boost tourism, and enabling online cannabis sales will allow small businesses to expand their operations to online sales.

We also implemented a number of changes to support small businesses throughout the pandemic in addition to the most generous supports in Canada; for example, allowing restaurants and bars to sell liquor and cocktails for takeaway, giving them an additional source of revenue and helping them to stay in business during the necessary public health restrictions; introducing paperless options for workers' compensation for clients and developing processes to share information virtually, which resulted in clients receiving more timely information on their application and reducing WCB's costs and environmental impact; designing the small and medium enterprise relaunch brand in a way that minimizes the administrative burden and red tape implications on business, which allowed applications to be processed and paid quickly; launching the Biz Connect service to support businesses and their safe reopenings and provide accurate information in a timely manner; developing the MyAlberta emergency isolation support system in just eight days, providing a fast, convenient, secure, cost-effective way to disburse emergency funds to eligible Albertans; amending nursing home regulations to allow nurse practitioners rather than just doctors to prescribe medications and act as primary care providers in nursing homes so that physicians could focus on COVID-19 response; introducing virtual doctor visits to reduce travel and physical contact during the pandemic; supporting small business by clarifying that liquor manufacturers can produce hand sanitizers; allowing lawyers to use videoconferencing to remotely witness and commission legal documents required for several acts; suspending the requirement for organizations to hold in-person meetings in order to protect public health and safety during the pandemic, giving thousands of businesses, nonprofits, societies, co-operatives, and condominium corporations the option to meet and vote online; and so, so much more.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 80 will make a difference for Albertans, and I encourage all members to support this bill. I'm proud of the progress we've made to reduce red tape by more than 18 per cent so far, which is well on our way to meeting our commitment to reduce red tape by one-third. I'm proud of how Bill 80 and future red tape reduction legislation will contribute even further because on this side of the House we know the value of cutting red tape.

Mr. Speaker, just to address a few more of the comments from the members opposite as this bill has been debated, the Member for

Edmonton-Decore had made a comment regarding the 5 per cent registration fee for Christmas trees being cut, that we've dealt with that but that people still have to fill out a form. Was the member implying that we should scrap the form, potentially impacting the environment? What about sustainable harvesting practices? The member opposite was also making comments around us trying to justify the \$10.5 million on this ministry. It's called a return on investment. We've saved Albertans and Alberta businesses over \$1.2 billion so far, not to mention the billions of dollars of investment that we have attracted into this province. A few weeks ago alone we had a \$7 billion investment.

4:20

The Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs commented about the lack of consultation process. I tried to find the consultation process that the members opposite had done when they introduced the carbon tax. Oh, wait a minute. That's right; there was no consultation on the carbon tax introduction. So that's rich. There was no consultation by the members opposite before they blindsided and crippled Albertans and Alberta businesses with the introduction of their carbon tax. We did consult, for example, on the establishment of entertainment districts with municipalities, not to mention the nine red tape reduction industry panels that meet frequently, meetings which I sit in on.

The Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview also talked about why he ran to defeat the former PC government, and he tells the story of why he got involved in politics. I'd like to tell my story, but I don't really have a couple of hours. In a nutshell, I can say that most members on this side ran because they love Alberta and they love this province whereas members on the opposite love socialism.

The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. Again, I gave numerous examples of the significant impact our red tape reduction efforts have made. One of the richest comments was . . . [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Referring to a Member by Name Decorum

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. Members will direct their comments through the chair, keep their off-the-record comments to themselves.

I was reluctant to interrupt at the time because it wasn't a massive deal, but I just might remind the associate minister that even when reading a quote that might be attributing something good to the hon. the Minister of Indigenous Relations, it would be inappropriate to use the minister's name. I'll just remind you for future use.

If members would keep their comments to themselves, I think that that will help decorum this evening.

The associate minister.

Debate Continued

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that when they're activated and they start barking, it's because they don't like hearing the truth. The Member from Edmonton-South . . .

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order has been called. [interjections] Order.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Sabir: Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j). I thought this third reading was a bit strange. I haven't heard that kind of third reading

in this House, but where the minister went totally off the rails is when she's referring to the members on the other side, that they were barking. I think that's unparliamentary. The member should be retracting and apologizing for this comment, and she should be ashamed of making such comments.

The Speaker: The associate minister, on the point of order?

Ms Fir: Yes.

The Speaker: On the point of order.

Ms Fir: The Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview might want to help out his colleague as a former English teacher. Definition of barking: utter abruptly or aggressively or to speak in a curt, loud, or usually angry tone, which is what the members opposite were subjecting me to. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

I think members can allow the Speaker to make a decision based upon the facts at hand. I would just say that while I appreciate the use of the *Webster's* dictionary, that the associate minister provided us so graciously the definition of barking, I also think that barking is often a use of a particular animal, and implying that the opposition are dogs is probably unparliamentary. I would encourage the member to apologize and withdraw.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I apologize and withdraw.

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

Debate Continued

Ms Fir: Thank you. Just a few more comments to satisfy the crowd here. The Member for Edmonton-South: this was probably one of the richest quotes in their debates against this bill, in referring to our government, that government is not focused on bringing back economic prosperity. When I heard that one, I had to rewind it a few times to make sure I heard that correctly, this coming from a member whose government drove out billions of dollars of investment. We have brought back billions of dollars in investment while still dealing with a hostile federal government and COVID. Anyways.

Again, another rich comment from the Member for Calgary-Mountain View was when she was referring to the rising costs that this government has foisted upon them. Again, I'm not sure what they'd call the introduction of the carbon tax.

Mr. Speaker, there's much more of the greatest hits of some of the inane things the members opposite have said, but I'll leave it there and just say that I would like to just wrap up by pointing out one of the greatest arguments that I can make for the importance of red tape reduction and the great work this government has done. I give full credit to my predecessor, the MLA for Taber-Warner. Under the NDP the CFIB's red tape reduction annual report card rating was three consecutive Fs in a row, but under the hard work of the MLA for Taber-Warner and all of my ministerial MLA colleagues the CFIB rewarded this government a letter grade of A on red tape reduction.

Mr. Speaker, I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 79 Trails Act

The Speaker: The Minister of Environment and Parks.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to move third reading of Bill 79, Trails Act.

If passed, the Trails Act and associated amendments will do the following. They'll establish the cornerstone for a sustainable trail management system on public land. They will enable trails to be designated for specific uses such as hiking and horseback riding. They will enable improved trail planning, which will consider other land use and values. They'll strengthen protection of trails so that Albertans can enjoy them for years to come. They will enable, Mr. Speaker, better enforcement tools to prevent environmental damage and promote environmental stewardship of public land. It will promote a bigger role for partners in managing trails and their maintenance. Under the Trails Act, Alberta will have a clear mandate for sustainable recreation. Alberta's trail system will be modernized, making our trails more environmentally sustainable, safe, and enjoyable for Albertans. If passed, the Trails Act will also strengthen and support partnerships with volunteers who help maintain and improve Alberta's trail system in order for us to effectively implement new recreation systems and support amendments to the Public Lands Act.

Mr. Speaker, that's what the Trails Act will do. What it will not do is shut down any existing trails and shut down large tracts of land, unlike the approach that the Official Opposition took to Crown land management and trail management when they were in power.

I would also like to point out that this bill is supported by trail organizations, not just off-highway vehicle organizations, who the NDP hate, but also by a large variety of organizations that work to maintain our trail systems across the province. Everything from hiking, cross-country skiing, horseback riding, mountain biking, and everywhere in between has been asking for this legislation for a long time. As Chris Brookes, the executive director of the Alberta Snowmobile Association, points out, they've been asking for this legislation for over two decades, and this government will fulfill their commitment to them in this platform shortly, I hope, Mr. Speaker, with that.

It's also supported by other organizations such as the Alberta Hiking Association. Don Cockerton, who is the chair currently of the Alberta Hiking Association, said this about the legislation:

The Alberta Hiking Association supports the introduction of a Trails Act to help develop a system of high-quality, sustainable trail opportunities for Albertans. This act needs to guide and encourage the development of strong and lasting partnerships between trail groups and the Alberta government. It [will] ensure good planning and design as well as the provision of good user information, education and enforcement.

Mr. Speaker, I'll give you one other one. Linda Strong-Watson, the executive director of the Alberta TrailNet Society, said:

Alberta TrailNet and its provincial trail partner organizations and volunteers have been working with the Government of Alberta and other stakeholders for many years to develop provincial trail legislation. We appreciate the support [the] government has provided, and look forward to continuing this partnership towards improved recreation and tourism opportunities and sustainable trails.

Those are the organizations that the NDP has spent weeks – weeks – trying to stop from being able to do their important work, yet again showing over and over inside the Legislature their complete and utter support for extreme organizations like Y2Y and others that have focused on banning Albertans from public land. The focus that the NDP has taken all the way on this issue is that – and they have not changed their approach even on this important piece of legislation right now, ignoring the incredible volunteer organizations that work to be able to provide recreation opportunities to Albertans all across the province and instead focusing on siding with extreme ideological views about preventing human

beings from being able to access their own backyard inside this province.

4:30

You know, I've spoken in the Legislature often about the Friends of the Eastern Slopes, an organization that I know that you know, Mr. Speaker, not too far away from your constituency and definitely in the heart of mine, that is a volunteer organization that has managed to keep the Ya Ha Tinda Ranch open to Albertans and people from all around the world who come there for once-in-a-lifetime, sometimes, equestrian opportunities on the border of Banff national park in some of the most beautiful landscapes inside this province – check that: the most beautiful landscapes inside the province – certainly a place that many people enjoy coming to.

If it was not for the Friends of the Eastern Slopes, we would not have the opportunity – the ranch was closed many years ago to people being able to come and visit and to utilize it for recreation opportunities, which they had, at that point, done for generations. Without the Friends of the Eastern Slopes being founded and putting in their significant effort to be able to maintain and clean and keep that landscape open to Albertans, maintain campgrounds, maintain trails, and provide opportunities for Albertans to enjoy that, we would not be able to do that to this day.

Now, during the NDP government's time they did nothing to support the Friends of the Eastern Slopes. In fact, they didn't even bother to consult them when they tried to bring in their land-use plans west of Rocky Mountain House and Sundre, which would have shut access to large portions of the west country for the people that called it home for generations, including the O'Chiese, the Sunchild, and the Bighorn, who were all universally against it and not consulted by . . .

Mr. Ellis: They said that they thought they would like it.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Yeah. The NDP definitely tried to imply that the O'Chiese, the Sunchild, and the Bighorn were going to like it, but they all showed up at many, many rallies and made it very clear, from the chief on down, how ridiculous that assertion by the then NDP government was.

There was no support at all for the Friends of the Eastern Slopes, and in fact, Mr. Speaker, the NDP has spent the last several weeks trying to create more red tape for those organizations who are out just trying to be able to help protect the landscape and critical partners.

I'll give you one other organization that comes to mind, Mr. Speaker. It's one from your constituency, and that's the Olds Snowmobile Club, who, like so many of the constituents of the great riding of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, vacation in Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. In this case, they have their clubhouse for the Olds Snowmobile Club – great guys; I know you know them, and I do as well – actually in the Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre riding, out where some of the best trails would be for snowmobiling in our area. This is an organization that has dedicated years, decades, to helping maintain trails to access some of the most beautiful landscapes that this province has to offer and provide recreation activities for generations of Albertans and is the exact type of organization that we should be trying to partner with to be able to maintain sustainable trail networks.

Unfortunately, the NDP's extreme ideological bent, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to trying to prevent people from accessing the west country, has stopped those organizations from receiving appropriate support and partnership from the government in protecting the important work that they're doing. With the passing of this legislation, we will right that wrong.

I do want to close off, Mr. Speaker, because I know that there's lots of stuff that we have to deal with tonight, to make clear the

opportunity that we have to fulfill a platform commitment, which is the goal, ultimately, of this legislation. I've talked about it along the way on a couple of pieces of legislation that are tied to some of the things that the NDP did inside the eastern slopes that, frankly, were horrific and to the promises that we made to Albertans at that time that we would put into place if we were given the privilege of being in government, which we were. This is the last major component of that. We promised Albertans that we would come forward with a new management approach to be able to manage areas that Albertans wanted to enjoy but also to deal with the tremendous conflicts that were starting to take place on those landscapes.

This is a real solution, unlike the Official Opposition's, who chose to make announcements about people's communities with fake backdrop pictures of them in downtown Edmonton. I mean, Mr. Speaker, every time I actually bring it up, it just shocks me how the now NDP Official Opposition could think that they were going to gain the co-operation of a large portion of west-central Alberta and, before that, of southwest Alberta, down in the Crowsnest area, by making announcements that would change the way their entire community operated and lived and not even have the courage or the courtesy, the common courtesy, to get in your vehicle and drive to that community. The then environment minister during that period of time never came to the community of Rocky Mountain House while trying to completely change the entire area around where Rocky Mountain House is.

Mr. Speaker, Rocky Mountain House has existed, as you know because you spent a little bit of time in Nordegg when you were growing up, I know, since 1799, and they found themselves in a position where the current government of the day couldn't even be bothered to get in a car and drive to meet with Rocky Mountain House town council, Clearwater county council, the community of Nordegg. They forgot that the community of Sundre even existed. I had to fight at that time to even get community halls done by Alberta environment officials that were then working for the then NDP government, to even bother to drive down to the community of Sundre, which was appalling – they took that approach, not to even engage, tried to ram through outrageous rules that would have impacted everything from trapping to First Nation communities to oil and gas to recreational opportunities inside that area. That's the approach the NDP took.

You know, we had to back up and also emphasize that they did that to the First Nation communities of Clearwater county on top of that. You often watch the NDP on this legislation and other legislation stand up and act like they are the great champion of First Nation communities inside our province. Well, we can look no further than the Bighorn plan. They never even bothered, Mr. Speaker – never even bothered – to call the O'Chiese, to call the Sunchild, to call the Smallboy Camp, or to call the Bighorn community. I said that Rocky Mountain House has been there since 1799. Those communities have been there a heck of a lot longer than 1799. Not even to take the time to call those communities, to speak to them at all, and to get their feedback was outrageous.

We at that time fought tirelessly to stop the NDP plan, which, by the way, not just the First Nation communities were against. I'd never seen anything like this in the years that I've been in politics, Mr. Speaker. Everybody was against it. You know how hard it is to get all your municipalities to agree on something? I know you have a large rural riding. You know. Lots of the rural MLAs that are here will know that it's pretty rare to get every mayor and every reeve saying the same thing while standing on the stage fighting against the NDP plan that they couldn't be bothered to talk to anybody about.

I'm going to miss some of them, Mr. Speaker, but I'm going to list a bunch of them: the community of Rocky Mountain House, the

community of Clearwater county, the community of Nordegg, the community of Drayton Valley, the community of Brazeau county, the community of Buck Lake, the community of Wetaskiwin county, the community of Rimbey, the community of Ponoka county, the community of Eckville, the community of Bentley, the community of Lacombe county, the community of Mountain View county, the community of Sundre, the community of Caroline, the community of Water Valley, the community of Olds, on and on. All stood up against the NDP's ridiculous attempt to shut that access to the communities' land.

This is a fulfillment, Mr. Speaker, of a better way to do that in partnership with the people that actually care about the landscape, that don't need to do a fake backdrop at a YMCA in Edmonton because they actually know where the mountains are and they know how to drive to places like Rocky Mountain House, to fulfill the commitment to stand with them and partner to make sure that we can protect our landscape, have sustainable recreation on that landscape for generations to come, and to stand up against the NDP and their ideological friends who want to block Albertans from their landscape.

I urge all the members of this House to pass this legislation as quickly as possible, Mr. Speaker, so we can fulfill that promise to Albertans and we can stand up to the NDP once and for all on land grabs in this province.

Mr. Speaker, I move to adjourn debate as well.

The Speaker: I thought that that might be happening.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Motions

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise . . .

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Time Allocation on Bill 79

111. Mr. Jason Nixon moved:

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 79, Trails Act, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in third reading, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

Mr. Jason Nixon: I apologize, Mr. Speaker. I was a little bit ahead of time there. It's like we didn't co-ordinate.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is a motion for time allocation. A member of the opposition has up to five minutes to respond. Is there a member that wishes to do that? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I rise to urge members of the House to vote against this motion. I appreciate that the government doesn't want to continue hearing from us the concerns of Albertans, the questions they have about cancelled surgeries, the questions they have about who was in charge in August. I appreciate that they would like to go home, but I think that there are unanswered questions about a lot of this legislation. I do believe that the Legislature in this place performs an incredibly important function.

4:40

I believe that I can accurately state that, in fact, since this government has come into power, every single session has ended this same way, by closure being invoked. Mr. Speaker, I think that's

incredibly problematic. I'm not saying that it's a tool that doesn't have any place, but I think that if you find yourself in a position as a government where you have created the sort of place where there is such fervent opposition to the actions you are taking amongst members of the public that MLAs that represent those members of the public feel compelled to continue until such time as they are cut off, that's incredibly problematic.

I think members should vote against this motion. I think this government owes it to Albertans to stay here and continue to be accountable for their actions. I think we have rarely seen a failure to act on the scale of what this government engaged in in August, not just refusing to take action but refusing to so much as stand before the public and be accountable. Mr. Speaker, lives have been lost. They have been permanently impacted. I think that, at a very minimum, this government owes an explanation to the people, so we have sought that explanation, and we will continue to do it. I appreciate that that leaves this government in a position where they badly want to go home because they don't want to be accountable, but this legislation is problematic. This Legislature fulfills an important function in our democracy, and I think that members of the House should vote against this motion.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 111 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:43 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Lovely	Reid
Allard	Luan	Rowswell
Copping	Madu	Rutherford
Ellis	McIver	Shandro
Glubish	Neudorf	Sigurdson, R.J.
Gotfried	Nixon, Jason	Smith
Hanson	Nixon, Jeremy	Stephan
Issik	Orr	Toor
Jones	Panda	Williams
LaGrange	Rehn	

Against the motion:

Barnes	Eggen	Phillips
Bilous	Ganley	Sabir
Carson	Goehring	Sweet
Deol		

Totals: For – 29 Against – 10

[Government Motion 111 carried]

Time Allocation on Bill 80

112. Mr. Jason Nixon moved:

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 80, Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2021 (No. 2), is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in third reading, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Government House Leader has moved Government Motion 112. This is a time allocation motion that allows the opposition to respond for up to five minutes.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak against this motion. I think that's pretty much the modus operandi of this government. That's how they govern. On anything important if they don't want to debate – if they are private member bills, they'll send to the committees. That curtails the debate. Their motions, private member motions, they'll send to the bottom of the Order Paper. That curtails the debate. If it's a leadership review for their leader, I guess postpone it forever. That's the kind of behaviour, that's the kind of attitude we are seeing from the government, that on all issues that matter to Albertans they try to curtail debate. We are here as elected members of this House to represent people in our constituencies, to represent Albertans in our constituencies.

Earlier the minister who brought this bill referred to opposition comments and opposition participation in debate as barking. That's the attitude of . . .

Mr. Jason Nixon: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order has been called.

Point of Order Items Previously Decided

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, you've dealt with the issue of barking. The hon. minister apologized and withdrew. You considered the matter dealt with. For the hon. member to bring it back up I think is completely inappropriate.

Mr. Sabir: I think on a daily basis the Government House Leader, including the Premier – they have used things that have been dealt with before. It's not a point of order. It's something that the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction said, referring to the opposition, that they are barking. That's the value they put on our participation in the democratic process and debate here in this Chamber. I don't think it's a point of order.

The Speaker: I am prepared to rule on the point of order. I would say that this matter was dealt with and concluded. I also accept that on occasion members of the Assembly will raise previous issues that have been dealt with and concluded, so I'm sympathetic to the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall and his arguments. What I would do is just provide some general caution around this particular issue and others as we march towards the dinner break and on to what may be a long evening. If we stick to the matter at hand and spend less time discussing the issues around the issue, almost exclusively decorum is better.

The hon. member.

Debate Continued

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was saying that in the name of red tape this bill is making substantial changes and sweeping cuts to the programs and services that Albertans rely on. That's why it's important that we have the time to debate on this issue. For instance, this bill contains changes to learner benefits. Government is eliminating it altogether, but they still have the audacity to say: oh, it will be continued under a different regulation, which doesn't exist yet. I think that government shouldn't be curtailing debates on issues that matter to Albertans, the way that during the – I guess the default process for the government is to ram through their ideological agenda of cutting services, slashing services, making sweeping cuts to the programs that Albertans rely on.

I urge all members of this House to vote against this heavy-handed and undemocratic motion, especially those members of the UCP caucus who are looking for a leadership review. I think they

should be voting with us against these undemocratic and heavy-handed things to send government a message that that's not acceptable.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Government House Leader has moved Government Motion 112.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 112 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:52 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Lovely	Reid
Allard	Luan	Rowswell
Copping	Madu	Rutherford
Ellis	McIver	Shandro
Glubish	Neudorf	Sigurdson, R.J.
Gotfried	Nixon, Jason	Smith
Hanson	Nixon, Jeremy	Stephan
Issik	Orr	Toor
Jones	Panda	Williams
LaGrange	Rehn	

Against the motion:

Barnes	Eggen	Phillips
Bilous	Ganley	Sabir
Carson	Goehring	Sweet
Deol		

Totals:	For – 29	Against – 10
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[Government Motion 112 carried]

The Speaker: I just remind members – I saw two members moving around the Chamber during the division – it's important that once you take your seat, you remain there until the completion of the division.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, I believe, has a brief request for unanimous consent.

Ms Phillips: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I would just like to request unanimous consent to revert to tablings.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Tabling Returns and Reports (reversion)

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

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the House for their indulgence. I rise to table the requisite number of copies of a piece of correspondence received by me from the Lethbridge Police Commission.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 79 Trails Act (continued)

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others wishing to join in the debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning has risen.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and to speak to third reading of Bill 79 although I'm not too thrilled about the fact that we only have a one-hour debate. My hope is that we will see some willingness by the government to give way to the opposition to be able to have some time to speak to this piece of legislation in third reading, different than what we saw last night, when we saw ministers taking the last four minutes of closure of these debates.

[Mr. Hanson in the chair]

I would like to speak specifically to some of the comments that we heard the minister speaking about in his remarks as we moved into his opening of third reading. Part of what we heard the minister speaking about was a platform commitment that the government, the UCP, had in regard to trail management. Now, I'm not going to dispute whether or not this form of legislation was part of their platform, but what I will speak to is the fact that there was also a piece of the platform that this government has not delivered on. That was a commitment that OHV fees would also be part of their trail management agreement. Now, it was clear – and it was clear, actually, even in the last estimates by the minister – that OHV fees, no different than the Kananaskis fee, would be put in place. It was actually baked into the budget because, as the minister clearly said, it was a commitment that the UCP made during the last election; they follow through on their commitments; they follow through on their platform. Yet here is the opportunity to see that happen, and it hasn't happened.

5:00

It's hard to take at face value what the minister says when it comes to these pieces of legislation when, on one hand, it's about, "Well, we made a commitment; we're going to follow through on it," all these things, yet it's not actually being completely followed through on. You know, there was an opportunity for OHV fees to be put in during the Kananaskis pass legislation. We see it again where the opportunity could have been put in through this piece of legislation. Both of those times that hasn't occurred.

Now, we also heard from the minister about, well, consultation. He indicated that he'd spoken to some communities about the importance of trail management and that this was an opportunity for tourism and a variety of different things. I've also been speaking to communities and specifically the Rural Municipalities association around some of these changes that have been made.

One of the things that was highlighted to me was the changes that were made recently with the Kananaskis pass. As we know, with the Kananaskis pass the requirement for that pass is that you must have it if you're going to park in any provincial park or on any public land. You will receive a fine if you don't have your pass and you're seen to be parked in those areas. Now, what I would have been curious to hear from the minister about is how well that's going.

Since this pass has been implemented, what I'm hearing is that in bedroom communities around Kananaskis, where people are trying to access these bike trails and are trying to access, let's say, for example, the Three Sisters or those areas, the neighbourhoods that are at the access of many of those areas are now having congestion where people are parking on their streets. They're blocking their driveways, they're blocking access to communities, and they are blocking access to golf courses, a variety of different places where people have quickly figured out that if they're in a classified residential area and not in a provincial park or not on public land and they park and they don't have a pass, then they don't actually get a fine.

What's happened is that the individuals that live in these communities surrounding the Kananaskis area are now being impacted by the decisions of this government when it comes to the Kananaskis pass – my understanding is that representatives of those communities have come to the minister and said, "This is a problem" – to the point where some of these communities have actually had to hire their own security staff to be able to monitor their neighbourhoods because their own residents can't access their properties.

I find that interesting because when this bill was debated previously in second reading, in Committee of the Whole, we heard from the representative of Kananaskis, who indicated that there have been no issues, that everybody liked the Kananaskis pass and that people were excited about the Trails Act because it was going to open up new trails and all of these opportunities and tourism and all the things. When she was specifically asked, because I did, you know, go back and forth a bit, "Have there been any concerns or issues?" clearly that member said no, yet at RMA this very issue came up because it is impacting the communities that are in those areas.

You know, the hon. minister will talk about his area of Rocky Mountain House and consulting with his constituents – fair enough; I recognize that this Trails Act will impact that area, for sure – but what I didn't hear about is how it's going to work in other communities outside of his riding, the concerns that have been brought forward by many of the individuals that live in those communities about some of the changes that have already been made in regard to the Kananaskis pass, the fact that there's no OHV fee, all of these other things that have been brought forward to me, and how those communities' voices are not being reflected in the debate by the minister.

In fact, what the solutions to some of those problems might be – I would have thought that there would have been a recognition by the government as they're implementing a new piece of legislation that things might need to be tweaked a little bit to ensure that the communities that are surrounding these areas aren't negatively impacted, yet we didn't hear that because everything is just roses on the government side and there's never a problem with any of the pieces of legislation or decisions that are ever made.

In summary, in that section I would say that there are two issues. One issue is that the government didn't actually follow through on their platform commitment where they said that they would be doing this. The biggest piece, which was the OHV piece, which is in the platform and which was committed to in the budget, has still not been followed through on. Then, on top of that, the fact is that when the government speaks about consultation, it's very clear that the only people that the minister consulted with were in his own neighbourhoods and constituents, and he has completely ignored the major tourism areas in Alberta such as the Kananaskis area that have been negatively impacted around some of those decisions.

Now I'll move on to the concerns that have also been raised. The minister continues to speak about this idea of listening to environmentalists that are concerned about the environmental impacts. Well, I mean, as the minister of environment you would think that being concerned about environmental impacts is actually his job and is part of this discussion and that the concerns that are being brought up should just have some reasonable responses and answers. It shouldn't turn into a conversation where individual groups who may be concerned about the environmental impacts are all of a sudden considered extremists because they're asking questions about: how are we going to protect these areas as we continue to develop them?

We all know that we've got some serious species in this province that are identified under the SARA, which is federal jurisdiction. I

recognize that. Caribou, grizzly bear, and trout are three species. We have been told and have been encouraged to ensure that when we do any type of development, whether it be for recreational or economic purposes, we are ensuring that we are looking at the areas around these species to make sure that they're protected. Now, one of the concerns that has come up is specifically around caribou. We know that they are very shy creatures. They don't like their environments to be disrupted, and when that happens, it creates a lot of stress.

We've heard in a part of the feedback in regard to this piece of legislation that there are certain areas where trails have been overbuilt, that if allowed to continue to expand, we'll continue to move into these areas – the minister has been very, very clear that this act won't close trails – yet we're expanding the trail network. We're not going to be closing under this piece of legislation any trails, so how is ensuring that we are abiding by the SARA and the protection of these species going to be balanced with the development of future trails? It's not an unreasonable question, and it is part of the environmental management that the minister is required to do.

When we see experts coming forward who are saying that we have some certain areas in this province where this is a concern, I would hope that instead of moving into the rhetoric that we just heard from the minister through his speech, we would actually just get some reasonable responses around: "You know what? We recognize that there are some areas. We need to be careful with caribou. We need to be careful with grizzly bears because we don't like it when they interact with humans, and of course we need to create buffer zones around our waterways so that our trout are protected." Those are reasonable things. Those are not extreme environmental thoughts. Those are just reasonable pieces of looking at an expansion of a trail network.

I do believe that, you know, there was an opportunity here where the minister could have provided a little bit more reassurance and detail. There could have been a willingness and understanding that there are some legitimate concerns. When as the opposition we bring these concerns forward, part of that is because we're hearing from people that there are concerns. Again, I'm going to kind of focus a bit on that fact. When we hear these things and we bring them forward, to just dismiss them as the opposition trying to get into the rhetoric – the reality of it is that what we're bringing forward are things that we've heard that are impacting these communities that are talking about these issues. I think that those issues should be taken seriously. They should be taken seriously by the MLA that represents their area, but they definitely should be taken seriously by the minister who has implemented these pieces of legislation.

5:10

Now, I don't think I'll go too much farther into this piece because I know that as we are time allocated, there are other members that are going to want to be able to speak to this piece of legislation. I do think that it is time that the government be honest and be transparent and acknowledge that when they say that they made a platform commitment, they actually haven't followed through on all of it. If they had, they would have done the OHV commitment, like they had in their platform. There would be a fee here, no different than the Kananaskis fee, and there would be a plan in place to ensure that when these fees are being implemented, they don't disrupt the communities that are surrounding.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Any other members? The Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to Bill 79, the Trails Act. I had an opportunity earlier to outline a number of my concerns, but I think they're worth bringing up again because there are a lot of reasons to be concerned about this.

I'm going to start my sort of discussion on why I think this is problematic and will not achieve the stated goals with a quote from University of Calgary professor Shaun Fluker at the law school. He called the bill "a statute that consists almost entirely of permissive statements which authorize a minister . . . to enact all the substantive legal rules sometime later outside of the legislative process." Now, admittedly, this is a description that could be applied to a lot of things about this government though in this case it was said about this bill which is currently before us.

Why is that problematic, Mr. Speaker? Well, it's problematic because the point of the Legislature is to essentially use public scrutiny as disinfectant. We come in here, and we have the opportunity to talk about bills. Ministers have to come into the House. The media has the opportunity to speak to them, well, sort of right now. Having moved to the podium process during COVID rather than the scrum process has resulted in the ability of a lot of people to be mysteriously busy when things go wrong in their files. But I digress. The point of this place is to use sunshine as disinfectant. It's to make the people who are making the decisions, generally the ministers in this case, subject to the scrutiny of the public and the media and to the comments of the opposition, which often cause additional questions by the public and the media. It's supposed to be sort of a feedback process.

What this bill does and a number of bills that the UCP have brought do is circumvent that process. They say that this bill will protect the environment, but it's entirely permissive. There's nothing in the bill that would actually suggest that; in fact, quite the opposite. We are time allocated, so I will try to keep my comments as on point as possible. Ministers of the government have demonstrated an interesting desire to get up and reframe any comments I make after I speak, so I'm trying to avoid that use of time given that we have only an hour to speak to this bill. In truth, this bill does nothing to protect anything. This bill doesn't require that we consider the cumulative impacts on Indigenous rights or on the environment. That, Mr. Speaker, is what's problematic. There doesn't seem to be an ability to consider the impact of sort of multiple different things at once.

You know, the hon. minister loves to wax philosophical about how we were trying to shut people out of their backyards or whatever it is. But, Mr. Speaker, the concern here is that nobody was trying to prohibit anyone from going anywhere. In fact, that wasn't what happened at all. What was happening is that certain trails were being designated for certain uses, and other trails were being designated for other uses. That's not unreasonable. Certain areas, we have learned – science has progressed. When we know better, we should do better.

One of the things that we have learned is that multiple impacts, particularly on fish habitat and areas where eggs develop, often sort of water courses or the edges of water courses, more specifically, have extremely detrimental impacts on those fish populations. If people are driving their ATVs over those shallow waters repeatedly and killing all the eggs, by definition that has an impact on people wanting to fish. I didn't make the rules, Mr. Speaker. I didn't make science or physics or biology or any of that the case, but it is – it is – the case. Even if the UCP wants to pretend that it's not the case, it continues to be the case. So this idea that somehow we were only prohibiting people and it wasn't in furtherance of protecting anyone is just wrong, because if you destroy all those fish eggs, the people who want to fish can't fish.

I think I said this in an earlier speech this afternoon, but they often say: good fences make good neighbours. The point is – you know, here's the demarcation. Everybody knows what side is theirs. Everybody knows what – there's no misunderstanding – they can and can't do, and I think that that's good. I'm a big fan of law and order, I guess, Mr. Speaker. I think that everyone knowing what the rules are and abiding by them allows us to live together in a society, and that is really what attempts were to do under the previous government.

Now, this bill purports to do that but does nothing of the sort. It is entirely permissive. You can create more and more and more trails, but if the use of one user group, for instance, someone riding their ATV over the edges of a lake where fish eggs are and impacting the right of someone else to fish, impacts another user group, there's no mechanism by which that will be remedied. The government says that they will remedy it, but again – and I've said this repeatedly as well – this is another one of those: trust us. Well, it's not in the bill. There's no requirement that we do it. There's no requirement that we consider cumulative impact. There's no requirement that we consider the environment but: trust us; we'll do it.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that Albertans have seen how good the UCP's "trust us" word is. We saw in August a government that abandoned the population to a pandemic, that abandoned their responsibilities and allowed a worse result in Alberta than in any other place in Canada. You know, the government keeps trying to say that it's the same, but it wasn't. People don't trust this government. Saying, "Trust us; we know the rules aren't in the legislation, the thing which writes the rules, but don't worry; we'll write them at a later point" is extremely problematic.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to point out that we did make attempts to remedy some of the deficiencies in this bill. One of them was specifically an attempt that would make the bill do what the minister has said it will do; that is, it would have caused the minister to have to consider cumulative impacts in advance of designating a trail. Now, the last time I had the opportunity to speak to this, a government minister, of course, stood up and said: well, you're saying that the trail density in some of our most delicate watersheds is too high already.

5:20

Mr. Speaker, I'm not saying that; I'm reading it. Scientists are saying that. I am merely reporting to this House what those scientists have said, and what they have said is that in some of our most vulnerable ecological areas there is already too much going on. There is already too much cumulative impact, and the damage can be incredibly long lasting. This is the other thing that this government seems to fail to grasp, that there are some things which once done cannot be undone. Sure, there can be reclamation attempts, but some environments once they are destroyed, some species once they become extinct: that's it. There's no second chance. We don't get to go back and do it over. These are serious considerations. They are clearly considerations that the minister of environment does not take seriously, but he ought to. One might argue, in fact, that it is his job to do so, to take seriously scientifically valid and proven environmental considerations.

That attempt by us to ensure that the government must consider adverse impacts was rejected. I think that's extremely problematic because while they stand here and sort of say, "Well, don't worry, we're going to consider it, we're going to consider adverse impacts; don't worry, we'll definitely do this analysis," it's not in the bill. There's no requirement for them to do it.

Mr. Speaker, I will say again that it has been referred to in articles as pure fantasy to assume that we can optimize multiple uses. That's

absolutely true. No truer words have ever been spoken, again, because damage done by one user group or interference by one user group with another exists. Cutlines, for instance, have an impact on caribou and populations, and that has an impact on uses by other users. It also has an impact on other wildlife and on the environment more generally. I think these are incredibly serious issues. They ought not to be laughed off. They ought not to be talked down to with peculiar rhetoric about, you know, one group that felt that being asked to share the landscape with others was in some way unfair to them.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, we proposed several amendments, and another one that I think is worth speaking to was an attempt to strike out section 10(1)(b) of this legislation. It's called a deficiency regulation. It says, "The Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations remedying any confusion in the application of or any difficulty or impossibility in applying any provisions of this Act." What that does is it gives cabinet an enormous amount of power to create regulations, regulations for which the power for creating the regulation isn't outlined. Essentially, what this says is the cabinet can create what's called a deficiency regulation in any instance where anything sort of goes wrong with this act.

Now, the ability to create deficiency regulations does exist in other places, but generally it's limited in scope, in time. Essentially, cabinet is given the power to sort of write these regulations to say, like: whoops, something went wrong; we wrote this act and we didn't consider a particular circumstance, and the circumstance has arisen that has created an impossibility or some sort of other problem. Cabinet can come in, can write a regulation. It can fix the problem. But generally that's for a time-limited period. Generally the deficiency regulation is allowed to exist for a year before the Legislature has to essentially accept it and put it into the legislation. The reason that's done is to respect the legislative branch, to respect the purpose and the function of the legislative branch in our system of democracy and not to usurp that function to the government.

We actually saw – one of the rare instances in which this UCP government backed down on a poor decision was when they did exactly that in the previous Bill 10, which allowed essentially legislating by way of ministerial orders. They were attacked from all sides on that – from the left, the right, and everywhere – which was right in light of the powers that they had given themselves, and they ultimately backed down on that.

People actually do care about legal separation of powers and about what the purpose of the Legislature is, and people cared when ministers gave themselves the ability to legislate by way of ministerial order, which may not even be published. That was problematic, and I think that this, too, continues to be problematic. It's very broad, and, in my view, it ought to be removed.

It also conflicts with sort of some other talk of sort of paramouncy in terms of the Public Lands Act because this allows cabinet to sort of come in and . . .

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to Bill 79? I see the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 79, an important piece of legislation, which has been time allocated by this government. While section 2 sets out a number of statements, the purpose of the act, which in a nutshell is about conserving the environment, we do not see anything concrete in this piece of legislation that will help us see how through it, this bill, the provisions of this bill, it will help this government achieve its purposes outlined in section 2.

[The Speaker in the chair]

While the purpose is about protecting the environment, we do not see, as my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View mentioned, a user fee for OHVs in this bill. Near Calgary the McLean Creek area is frequently used by OHV users. The government didn't put any fee there, but they're charging everyday Albertans who are going to K country. I guess those users must have the minister's ear, because they are not charged anything there.

The second thing I would say is that everything in this bill is about trusting this government, a government which still takes pride in cancelling the carbon levy as the best thing ever that they did, the first thing ever that they did. They want to be taken seriously about the environment, and they want Albertans and us to trust the minister that he will do everything right and in accordance with the purposes listed in section 2 of the legislation, in legal terms I'd say a skeleton piece of legislation that leaves essentially everything to be determined behind closed doors by the minister and cabinet.

5:30

The things that this bill is leaving for the minister to determine by order in council are critically important ones; for instance, that it's at the discretion of the minister to designate trails. There is nothing listed in this piece of legislation that this bill applies to these trails, that this bill creates these new trails, and how designation of those trails fits with the purpose of this act.

The same thing: the minister can establish management plans. The minister was critical of NDP plans in Bighorn, and here the minister wants carte blanche so that he could come up with management plans however he sees fit. Not only is the minister able to establish management plans; the minister is also reserving power in this piece of legislation that should the minister choose to delegate management of those trails to third parties, they will be able to do that. What will be the criteria to delegate those plans? What kind of agreement will we be entering into? What kind of input will the public have? What kind of opportunity will the public have for consultation? Nothing. It's all at the sole discretion of the minister responsible for this act.

There is nothing in this legislation that talks about forests surrounding those trails, that talks about wildlife around those trails, water bodies, fish, and watersheds. There is literally no mention of all that in this piece of legislation. And if we are to believe that this act is to carry out the purposes stipulated in section 2, there would be some details. There would be some details that this is how the government will achieve their purpose. I can tell you one thing: on this side of the House we cannot trust this government, and almost 80 per cent of Albertans don't trust this government on anything they do or say. Especially when it comes to protecting the environment, I think we saw how they approached coal mining. We saw how they approached new user fees in K country. The government cannot be taken at their word; they have to put something here.

One of my teachers from the University of Calgary wrote an article about it, ABlawg. That was the article my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View was referring to, I believe: Alberta Heads the Wrong Direction with Bill 79 – the Proposed Trails Act. It's November 8, 2021, written by Shaun Fluker and David Mayhood. Shaun Fluker was my teacher and one of the finest teachers I ever had. They are writing about it, and even the heading should alarm this government, what respected academia from one of the best universities in Alberta had to say about it. The heading says it all, that Alberta is headed in the wrong direction with Bill 79.

Like, they're not objecting to the purposes listed in section 2. The reason for that is that the government has not done their homework respecting what trails they want to designate. They have not engaged with Albertans at all. They want to just reserve power to

themselves so they can designate whatever trail they see fit to or whatever trail their insiders, donors ask them to. They have not talked about any management plans, how they will come up with those management plans, what those management plans will entail, who they will consult with, who they will work with. Again, there's no mention what criteria they will use to delegate management of these trails, and there is no mention of anything else as far as wildlife, fish, animals, other things in those areas, what they will do to protect them and conserve the environment for them.

That's the reason these university profs have written that piece and outlined the shortcomings of this legislation, because the government didn't do their homework and because the government doesn't know what they are doing with it. They may have been asked by somebody to do it, lobbied by somebody to do it. They also have reg-making power, which is legally described as deficiency regulations, which essentially give the minister power to do anything that they forgot to do, that's omitted, that's not included in this legislation. Like, it's a broad, broad reg-making power.

This article talked about that as well, that only Alberta and Manitoba may have used it, and only in two circumstances have they been used. One is to address a deficiency or impossibility that arises from transition from repealed legislation to new legislation. That's clearly not the case here.

[Mr. Hanson in the chair]

The second possibility they mentioned is "a difficulty or impossibility that arises from the dissolution of a statutory entity." That's also not a case where they needed to resort to this broad reg-making power, which may or may not withstand the scrutiny of the courts, in my opinion. But what it shows is that the government clearly didn't do their homework, and they have to resort to these tools like deficiency regulations, that if they remember something later on down the road, the minister will make an order or a regulation to fix that deficiency.

5:40

On this important piece of legislation, they also time allocated it. Not only didn't they tell us which trails they want to designate or how the minister will designate those trails, what the management plan will be, how they will be established, what the delegation plan will be, but they didn't tell us what they will do about the forests, wildlife, fish, water bodies, watersheds in those areas. Absolutely nothing. And they want us to believe that this is something that they are doing for the purposes outlined in section 2, to conserve the environment and conserve the wildlife, fish, water bodies, and all other things that are owned collectively by Albertans, who have every right to weigh in on any plans, on any legislation impacting their collective rights. But here the government is putting the minister responsible for this act in charge of everything, and they can do it behind closed doors through regulation.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Any other members wishing to speak? The Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 79, the Trails Act. I do believe this is my first opportunity to speak to this bill, so I'm appreciative of it. Similar to my colleagues, there are a number of challenges that I have with the bill as it's currently written.

[The Speaker in the chair]

You know, first and foremost – and I appreciate the fact that often details of bills are left to regulations, where they are carried out

through OICs, or orders in council, meaning that cabinet has the authority. But in this bill we're seeing a significant amount of authority being moved from an OIC requiring cabinet's approval to giving the minister unilateral authority to make a significant number of decisions. I appreciate that my colleagues have pointed out the fact that this current UCP government has lost the trust of many Albertans. Quite honestly, the Minister of Environment and Parks has also lost the trust of many Albertans. I mean, we have lots of examples of concerned Albertans. When the government was about to move forward with the mining of the eastern slopes, Albertans said: don't you dare. In fact, you know, we even had country stars weighing in on it, none other than Corb Lund, who was completely appalled at that thought.

You know, it is interesting. On the one hand, when the government talks about companies like Amazon's AWS and Infosys coming to Alberta, one of the top three reasons that these companies come to Alberta is for quality of life, and that includes, especially for Calgary and southern Alberta, access to the Rocky Mountains. Now, I will also say, of course, that Edmonton and our region have access to the Rocky Mountains as well through Jasper national park. But the point is, Mr. Speaker, that that's one of the driving forces behind these companies looking to jurisdictions like Alberta.

When the government is about to allow significant changes to our beautiful landscape, including opening up the eastern slopes to mining, that has a significantly negative impact on potential businesses in selecting to move to Alberta. I mean, it also has an impact on residents and whether or not people choose to stay in Alberta or those men and women that we're trying to attract to Alberta.

I mean, you know, one of the top issues that I've been seeing over and over again is that CEOs of small companies, medium companies, and multinational companies – their biggest challenge is all around talent attraction and retention. That's all I've been reading for the past couple of years, Mr. Speaker. I think COVID to an extent has exacerbated that problem. So we should be doing everything in our power to ensure that Alberta is the most attractive place, not just businesswise. Businesses realize that if they want good people, they need good people to be here, and people want to be able to access the beautiful landscapes that we have here in Alberta.

You know, despite what the minister has claimed as far as what was done under the NDP government – I mean, most of what he had said was simply not true, Mr. Speaker. Nowhere and at no time did our government try to reduce access to the backcountry or for Albertans to enjoy what we have here. In fact, I think most Albertans recognize – and I know that farmers and ranchers know this better than anyone – that we need to be good stewards of the land. We need that in order to survive but to prosper as well.

This is why I'm a big fan of the development of trails so that we don't have examples – and I know that many OHV users are really good about driving in designated areas, but we also recognize that there are some who aren't, and driving across creek beds has significant consequences for wildlife, especially for fish. We know that as it is already, the bull trout here in Alberta is a very sensitive species. Many of the folks that our caucus has engaged with, many stakeholders and groups, have indicated that we need to look at doing a better job taking care of our existing trails. I think this is one of the points that my colleagues have been trying to make, that, yes, we can look at expanding the trail system, but let's have a process for it and not just give authority to the minister to be able to designate wherever he wants what a trail is and to appoint someone to be responsible for it.

What dollars are going to be allocated to ensure that our trails are well maintained and well kept? If we're expanding our system – I

mean, I have it here in my notes, Mr. Speaker, just how many thousands of kilometres we already have. In fact, I just found it: 13,000 kilometres of designated and managed trails. What we do have as well are hundreds of thousands of kilometres of unintended trails. So it is critical that there are investments being made to maintain and manage our existing trail system, and I think for me it would make sense that that would be the best place to begin looking at: how do we maintain our trails that we currently have as opposed to just opening up a significant number of new trails?

Now, what's interesting – I mentioned stream crossings, and I think that one is a significant one. I mean, you know, stream crossings have a number of different consequences. I'll just say at the onset that I am not a scientist or a biologist, but we know that muddying downstream waters can affect and damage fish habitats. Now, I know that the Minister of Environment and Parks had claimed that crossings are going to be upgraded and cleaned up. What's interesting, though, Mr. Speaker, is that the Livingstone-Porcupine area alone has 3,000 of those stream crossings. That is significant. Now, I'm all for cleaning up and ensuring that we're taking care of them, but I don't see anywhere in this bill any commitment to spending the money needed to take care of these.

5:50

You know, there have been a number of conversations that the opposition has had as far as concerns of the bill as it's currently written. My colleagues have outlined a number of those. But we need to ensure that we are being the best stewards for our land and our species because we don't want to cause irreparable harm. I'm not convinced, Mr. Speaker, that this bill has the appropriate measures in place to protect our wildlife and our natural habitats. For those reasons, I will not be supporting this bill.

The Speaker: There are approximately six minutes remaining in the time allotted for this debate.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate a few short minutes during this closure debate to make a few comments on trails, which I have not had an opportunity to do yet. I mean, I'm finding it a little bit, you know, choked to have this time constraint on Bill 79 because I think it's a pretty high-priority bill for this session, not just in this Chamber but for Albertans in general, too, because, of course, we all like to recreate and use our Alberta trail systems. I, on a personal level, use them all the time in winter and summer. We look forward to making sure that those trails are maintained and that those trails are managed in an appropriate manner.

As our population grows, certainly we need more trails, especially adjacent to population centres so that people can find their way to the countryside quite quickly and enjoy, you know, various ways by which you can use the vast trail systems that we have here in the province of Alberta, using ATVs or other motorized vehicles, cross-country skiing – I've rediscovered it after a number of years, and it's a wonderful thing – snowmobiling, of course, and walking and hiking. I mean, there are just so many ways to enjoy these resources.

You know, if you put the word "trails" on a bill, on first blush it might seem pretty good. You say: "Yeah. Let's get some more. You do it. What a great idea." But what I have a problem with in this bill is twofold. Number one, it talks about trails, but it doesn't make a commitment to trails, right? Ultimately, that's what we do here in this Chamber. We make commitments of finances and resources to make sure that whatever we're putting into existence, whatever it happens to be – trails, in this case – we're actually supporting it with funding. To make a support of funding for trails, I would venture to

say, Mr. Speaker, is an exponentially valued investment: you put a dollar into a trail, and you're going to get \$5 worth of recreation and tourism and other ancillary benefits. So it's not as though I think it's a difficult decision to make, but you have to make it in, number one, a monetary, valued way and, number two, in a responsible way.

That's my second major question with this bill. It seems to almost be a knee-jerk or lurching sort of reaction to all of the negative news that this same UCP government had generated around parks – right? – putting into jeopardy so many of our provincial parks and protected areas around the province and creating a great uproar with coal licensing and all of that other stuff. You know, it almost feels like this one is sort of: well, hey, look over here; we are going to do something about trails, and we have a bill with a piece of paper with the word "trails" on it. You know, when you start reading the thing, though, you realize that it both drops a tremendous amount of power into the minister's office, the minister and the cabinet, and it also somehow abdicates from power of responsibility, right? It's a doubly negative thing, I would suggest, this bill, in regard to how it approaches building new trails, maintaining them, and so forth.

I mean, we all, I think, know that one of our best assets in the province of Alberta is our natural areas, and it has been mentioned before. It's not just a place by which we can live a healthier lifestyle, but it has a tangible economic value. You know, as culture and tourism minister – I was for a number of months in the last government – I learned about the value and the utility of building trail systems, particularly snowmobile trail systems east of here and using existing railbeds to build snowmobile trails and starting to build that infrastructure, where people can go there for an afternoon but also can go there for a number of days and hit a lodge or a place to have a meal and even stay overnight, modelled after a sort of established trail system in Quebec, where you can go for week excursions. People will fly to Quebec and rent a whole package of snowmobiles and stay in various chalets along the way and have a grand old time.

You know, we certainly have some version of that here in the province of Alberta, too, but, Mr. Speaker, you can't just do that by printing a piece of paper with the word "trail" on it, Bill 79, Trails Act, and away we go. You have to have a structure that's built in there, and it has to be supported. It has to be supported on a local and regional level as well. This bill does none of those things, clearly, so . . .

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt; however, pursuant to Government Motion 111 the time allotted for third reading debate of Bill 79, the Trails Act, has now expired.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:58 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Luan	Rehn
Allard	Madu	Reid
Ellis	McIver	Rowswell
Glubish	Nally	Shandro
Gotfried	Neudorf	Sigurdson, R.J.
Hanson	Nixon, Jeremy	Stephan
Issik	Orr	Toor
Jones	Panda	Williams
LaGrange	Pon	Yao
Lovely		

Against the motion:

Bilous

Eggen

Sabir

Carson

Ganley

Sweet

Deol

[Motion carried; Bill 79 read a third time]

The Speaker: Members, pursuant to Standing Order 4 the House stands adjourned until 7:30 p.m.

Totals:

For – 28

Against – 7

[The Assembly adjourned at 6:02 p.m.]

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