



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday evening, March 16, 2022

Day 10

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 16, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health on behalf of the Government House Leader.

COVID-19 Air Travel Restrictions

12. Mr. Copping moved on behalf of Mr. Jason Nixon:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly
- (a) recognize that the current air travel restrictions imposed by the government of Canada have no measurable public health benefit and continue to impact hundreds of thousands of jobs in the air travel and tourism sectors and
 - (b) call on the government of Canada to revoke
 - (i) its proof of vaccination requirement for airline passengers and
 - (ii) its predeparture COVID-19 testing requirement for international airline passengers entering Canada.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, we're in transition to living with COVID as opposed to responding to it as a pandemic emergency. All provinces recognize this. Medical and scientific experts in Canada and other countries recognize it. The Council of Chief Medical Officers of Health of Canada recognized it a month ago. They said in their statement that public health measures need to reflect the risk at a point in time. They need to change as the risk changes. As we've said from the start, restrictions need to be a last and limited resort, balancing the risk from the virus with the very real harm caused by the restrictions themselves. Restrictions should be imposed only when necessary, and they should be removed as soon as possible when the situation warrants.

In the case of the travel industry the harm from restrictions is obvious. These travel requirements are continuing to throttle a whole industry for no valid public health reason at this point in time. The Canadian public recognizes this, with polls showing overwhelming support for lifting restrictions right across the country. The question is: why is it taking so long for the government of Canada to recognize this?

Here's one of Canada's most prominent COVID experts, Dr. Zain Chagla, infectious disease physician and associate professor at McMaster University.

COVID-19 testing at the border does not make any sense; travel is no more risky than [any] other activities and there is no scientific reason to single it out... When first put in place, Canada's travel rules were designed to keep COVID-19 out of the country. Now that the virus is here and community spread is responsible for approximately 99 per cent of all infections, the rules governing travel are obsolete.

Another quote, from Dr. Dominik Mertz, division director of infectious diseases at McMaster: "There are higher risk, domestic settings that vaccinated people can access without testing than travelling internationally. The travel barriers... [simply do not] make sense."

Here's another. Dr. Irfan Dhalla, co-chair of the federal advisory panel on COVID-19 testing and screening:

I'm not sure I understand the rationale for testing travellers who are going to the U.S. for a very short trip... Even if we were going to require tests from these travellers, a test taken in Canada, before the trip even starts, would not be helpful.

Mr. Speaker, the federal requirements reflect a situation that has passed, when the COVID virus posed a different threat and our ability to manage it and respond to it was different. The reality now is that the omicron variant has spread widely enough to make our previous test, trace, and isolate regimen simply obsolete. More importantly, we're in a different situation in terms of our ability to live with the risk posed by the virus, at least in its current form, because of our very high vaccination rate in addition to the growing availability of new treatments. We now have more than 90 per cent of Albertans aged 12 and over with one dose of the vaccine, nearly 87 per cent with two doses.

Given the level of risk we currently have, Albertans are able to live their lives more or less normally. We've been able to enjoy life in a different way than we have over the past two years, with the reduction in restrictions as we moved into phase 2. Now, with the majority of these restrictions lifted, Mr. Speaker, we've gathered with loved ones, we've visited restaurants, we've played sports and made our own decisions about masking outside of settings like health care facilities, where they're still required.

As I reported this afternoon, it does not appear that easing measures has caused an uptick in numbers since we entered step 1 on February 8. We continue to see a decline or plateau in both our lagging and our leading indicators. There's been some variation in the positivity rate for PCR tests, but overall since step 1 began, it has dropped by 7 per cent. There is also a continuing and steady decline in our most important lagging indicator, hospitalizations. Today hospitalizations are down to 989, including 70 in ICU. Both those figures are down by approximately 40 per cent from when we began easing measures. It will take time for hospitalizations to get down to the level before the fifth wave, but that's where we're headed.

Now consider how discordant it is for Albertans when they encounter the current federal restrictions on travel. Those restrictions reflect a completely different assessment of the current risk and a completely different response to it. They reflect a virus that is a critical risk to the average traveller when the average Albertan today knows that the risk assessment is no longer accurate. They reflect an approach that puts a critical importance on identifying and isolating every case based on the goal of minimizing spread. Again, the average Albertan understands that those are no longer valid assumptions for public health policy. Mr. Speaker, we're living our lives more or less normally and, again, with the confidence that that's appropriate based on the evidence of the risk posed by the omicron variant today and our high levels of vaccination. Living our lives normally should include travelling normally. The requirements for travel should reflect the same risk and the same public health response that the average Albertan encounters in the rest of their lives.

It is time for the federal government to catch up with the evidence, with the views of infectious disease experts, with the views of our chief MOHs, and with the views of Albertans and other Canadians. I urge everyone in the House to support this government motion.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Government Motion 12 is before the Assembly this evening. Is there anyone wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know and many of my colleagues know, I used to be a WestJet. In fact, I truly believe that once you're a WestJet, you're always a WestJet. I share this with you because tonight I want to speak to Government Motion 12 because I understand how important air travel is for Alberta's economy and Albertans in general, for business, for recreation, to reconnect with family and friends after two long years of isolation.

Our airlines move people and goods to places they want and need to go. To do this day after day requires thousands of people, thousands of people that have been laid off, put on leave, or terminated altogether in the last two years. Many of them are friends of mine. The current federal imposition of pretesting and vaccination proof prevents these very same people from returning to work, feeding their families, and contributing to the recovery of our province and our country. At a time when we are seeing every province and almost every jurisdiction in the world eliminate restrictions related to the pandemic, the federal Liberals continue to be painfully disconnected and are failing to put forth policy that will allow us to effectively recover from the COVID pandemic. These restrictions limit the movement of goods.

Prepandemic, the visitor economy here in Alberta contributed \$8.2 billion. These restrictions are a barrier to those who wish to visit our amazing province before they even arrive here. The time and expense for a family looking to visit Alberta become prohibitive, and they no longer want to choose Alberta as their destination of choice. These individuals that fly to work camps across the north are also prevented from earning their livings. Those looking to travel internationally here to Alberta to invest and create jobs face a blockade. How do we expect to welcome these international travellers if we are putting up a roadblock before they even step foot on Canadian soil? Now is not the time we want to be pushing people away. Right now we want as many travellers as possible to keep coming and keep our economy growing as we navigate out of COVID-19.

Mr. Speaker, these restrictions were put in place to limit the amount of people who are unvaccinated from potentially spreading the virus to others, but here in Alberta and across the country the overwhelming majority of people have already been vaccinated, so why do we continue to impose unnecessary restrictions on people who already have immunity? These restrictions now have no logical benefit to health. We don't need to motivate people to get vaccinated, and we don't need to limit those going to events or restaurants or to bars or to sporting events, so why do we continue to do this for air travel? The science shows that once an individual receives two doses of vaccine, just two weeks later they are considered to have full immunity. Just two weeks. Yet the federal Liberals want to keep infringing on the rights of Canadians. By having proof that they are vaccinated, we are creating an unnecessary and unneeded barrier that has been long overdue to be removed.

Other jurisdictions around the world, including our southern neighbours, are lifting restrictions and learning to live with COVID. I'm curious why it feels like we are still steps behind from where we should be. We have seen restrictions lifted here in Alberta with the removal of mask mandates, the removal of the vaccine passports for restaurants, events, and other venues. This same mindset needs to be applied to air travel. Restrictions imposed by the government of Canada must be removed. This Assembly needs to come together and recognize that these restrictions have no practical health benefit anymore and continue to impact hundreds of thousands of jobs in the air travel and tourism sector. I ask my colleagues here this evening to join me in supporting Government Motion 12.

Thank you.

7:40

The Speaker: Hon. members, on Government Motion 12 are there others? The hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I would like to speak to Government Motion 12.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly

- (a) recognize that the current air travel restrictions imposed by the government of Canada have no measurable public health benefit and continue to impact hundreds of thousands of jobs in the air travel and tourism sectors and
- (b) call on the government of Canada to revoke
 - (i) its proof of vaccination requirement for airline passengers and
 - (ii) its predeparture COVID-19 testing requirement for international airline passengers entering Canada.

Mr. Speaker, most of the provinces have moved past the vaccine mandates. Alberta has limited mandates left. Other provinces have removed most of theirs, too. Just recently here, probably in the last few weeks, I heard a federal Liberal politician talking on TV about the lack of tourism: what have we got to do to get tourism back into Canada? At that time, that was about the time that the Emergencies Act came into effect. Obviously, things like that don't help, when people around the world get to watch the spectacle of Canada with the Emergencies Act invoked by the Prime Minister.

These restrictions on travel obviously are a barrier for tourism also. First, we have viruses on both sides of the border here between Canada and the U.S. We have COVID across Canada. There's no reason why we shouldn't be able to travel without these mandates. Many scientists now have spoken that this is not accomplishing any health benefits or any health protection. Our economy needs to move on. The benefits of tourism, which has been suffering greatly through this whole pandemic – we need to get back on track and get that tourism back to Canada so that our tourism operators can feel the benefits of an opening of airline travel. Again, there are business opportunities that are being lost because of this, too. Any type of restrictions obviously causes an opportunity for business to be lost.

Most of the world has moved on, and it's time for us to move on here in Canada, too. Let's get back to normal. Let's drop these restrictions and get the movement of air traffic, people going across borders so people can do multiple things like travel for business, travel for holidays, travel here for tourism. Let's get these businesses back to normal and move on.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to rise to speak to Government Motion 12. I know that you often say that we shouldn't have props in the House here today, so I've brought jet engines instead on my cufflinks here, no turboprops, no props, but some jet engines to just have this aviation discussion.

Mr. Speaker, with all levity aside on that, this is a very serious issue for us in Canada and particularly in Alberta. Like my hon. colleague from Livingstone-Macleod, I also served for almost two decades in the airline industry. Not only is it near and dear to my heart in terms of being an industry, but in Alberta we are so blessed that we have always punched above our weight here, with a proud history of our bush pilots back in the day of the pioneering of aviation to the time that we spent with the British Commonwealth air training program here. Again, a proud history for Alberta. The fact that we are now continuing to have many major airlines –

WestJet is the largest, and Flair and Swoop and Lynx Air and others – operating out of Alberta is highly important to the Alberta economy and to Albertans in terms of both inbound and outbound travel.

We all know that through this pandemic there has been no industry harder hit than the aviation and tourism sectors and those related industries in tourism and hospitality, so this is a time for us to step forward. This call for us to move ahead and beyond these restrictions, which we've done with the best of intentions to try and control this pandemic – but, Mr. Speaker, now is a time for us to really look forward, to start the healing and to start the movement to get our economy rolling, to get people back in the air, to literally spread our wings not only within this country but around the world.

Mr. Speaker, I reflect back on the fact that we are blessed to have international air services from our province from carriers like WestJet, Air Canada, KLM, Eurowings, and Edelweiss Air. Domestic carriers and those operating out of Calgary: WestJet, Air Canada, Flair, Swoop, and Lynx Air. Probably missing a few as well, some of the smaller: Central Mountain Air and Pacific Coastal Airlines. International and U.S. airlines like Alaska, American, Delta, United, which really create an opportunity for us to thrive, to be able to fly around the world, to be able to have those air services.

Mr. Speaker, that's why this motion is so important, the removal of the restrictions. Dr. Zain Chagla, who is an infectious disease specialist, said that he's "glad that we're aligning with many of our partner countries and dropping this [kind] of testing in order to really make sure that travellers feel secure in their travel and aren't necessarily subject to more expense or inconvenience," more expense and inconvenience in a very difficult time. We're trying to create a resurgence, a relaunch, of our airline industry, that has been so challenged and is facing other challenges, which I'll reference. What Dr. Chagla said was: "All it did was create inconvenience, all it did was discomfort the traveller . . . It really put an excess burden on the traveller without any significant yield locally." That is really something that we have to focus on here.

The Canadian Travel and Tourism Roundtable met in Calgary on February 28, an industry group in tourism, hospitality, aviation. It called the testing requirement a "non-science-based" obstacle undermining the sector and a "significant deterrent, discouraging international companies from resuming travel into Canada." To try and relaunch and restart this industry, that has been so damaged by this pandemic, Mr. Speaker, we need to move ahead with that.

As I look at the clauses of this motion, I'm going to actually speak to clause (b)(ii): "its predeparture COVID-19 testing requirement for international airline passengers entering Canada" is being removed. Now, we heard on the news today that that will be removed on April 1. We'll wait and see. We've seen some flip-flops before, in the past, from our federal government, but we're hearing that that announcement should be made on Thursday for that to be removed from requirements at the end of the month. So April 1 will be the day. Let's hope that that's not an April Fool's joke, Mr. Speaker.

The federal government will, however, continue to randomly test travellers upon arrival, but we've heard that the random testing has really not achieved a whole lot. In fact, Dr. Chagla said, "Once the Omicron wave hit Canada, the disease was so widespread that testing at the border became essentially useless." So we're moving getting rid of a useless requirement here, Mr. Speaker.

You know, it's also interesting, and I want to touch base here with some other industries within our province, the travel agency community, Mr. Speaker. Many of us have dealt with travel agencies in our own communities. They are small businesses or

small-business people who have bricks and mortar operations, and they're at great risk.

I'm just going to mention Lesley Keyter. They call her the Travel Lady. She happens to be one of my constituents and is on the board of ACTA, the Association of Travel Agencies. She's referenced this as a big challenge for their industry. Of course, when people are not travelling, they don't need travel agents. It's very sad to see that that is happening. She was quoted as saying that she hopes the federal government will not only remove testing requirements but also continue financial support programs for those in the travel industry beyond March. Mr. Speaker, the travel agents in our community are an embedded part of our community in the urban areas but even more so sometimes in the rural areas, where those people often will run a travel agency, and maybe next door will be an insurance or registry business. Those people are very, very much a core of our communities across this great province. I think it's time that we listen to those people and move forward.

The first clause is calling on the government of Canada to revoke its proof of vaccination requirements for airline passengers. Mr. Speaker, it's time. The government's mandate for domestic and international flights departing will remain in effect at this time, and I think it's something that we need to continue to advocate for. I just wanted to point out that in Europe on March 11 the Airports Council International, based in Brussels, and the International Air Transport Association, based in Geneva, called for all remaining COVID restrictions applying to intra-EU and Schengen area travel to be dropped, including all testing requirements, the need to present proof of vaccination or to complete a passenger locator form. This includes dropping mask wearing for travel within or between the EU states, where it is no longer required in other indoor environments. It's the same as what we have now here in Alberta, for the most part, as well. It's time for us to align, for us to move ahead and to heal the difficult times we've had in this province individually and specifically for our businesses and industries.

It's time. We're seeing this movement around the world, in the EU, who have been leaders not only in the front end of this, possibly in terms of putting in some of the requirements and the vaccination passports and restrictions, but they're now moving beyond that, as I believe we should here as well.

7:50

Mr. Speaker, the National Airlines Council represents Air Canada, Air Transat, Jazz Aviation, and WestJet. They represent over 60,000 people and carried over 80 million passengers just between those airlines. They support over 630,000 jobs in the transport and tourism sectors. They are also calling for us to move ahead through these restrictions.

I'm just going to close, Mr. Speaker, by referencing a comment that was put to us here from our new WestJet CEO, Mr. Alexis von Hoensbroech. He is brand new – I think he's only been in Canada now about two or three weeks – but he is going to set the path forward for WestJet and make sure that it continues to be a Calgary-based company that is going to grow and spread its wings globally. He said: emerging from the pandemic, our summer schedule marks a significant milestone in WestJet's recovery as we restore service to 94 per cent of our prepandemic routes; we are making significant investments network-wide, getting close to prepandemic capacity, to best serve our guests; as our industry rebuilds from the pandemic, Canadians and visitors to Canada will have endless options for summer travel with WestJet service to 43 domestic, 23 transport, 16 Caribbean, and 18 trans-Atlantic

destinations, with 600 daily departures; we look forward to seeing you back in the skies.

Mr. Speaker, we look forward to seeing Albertans back in the skies, Canadians back in the skies with the removal of these restrictions. We need to support our tourism sector here. We need to tell people to come to Alberta. We need to tell Albertans to get on planes and fly to other places. We need to support an industry that deserves to be supported, that is a huge part of our economy, our economic engine, our global connectivity. I'll be supporting this motion, and I encourage everybody in this House and all Albertans to speak out in favour of this motion.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Minister of Advanced Education, followed by the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to rise today to speak to Government Motion 12. I think, as all members know, Government Motion 12 is an important one before the Assembly. Unfortunately, I don't think I've heard too many members from the opposition speak tonight, but hopefully they will, because I think we can be on the same page when it comes to useless restrictions, and I think this is a clear example of useless restrictions. [interjection] To the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall: I'm happy to take interjections at any point, so if he wants to jump in, I'd welcome that.

Just getting back on topic here, Motion 12, as we all know, just to highlight it again, says:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly

- (a) recognize that the current air travel restrictions imposed by the government of Canada have no measurable public health benefit and continue to impact hundreds of thousands of jobs in the air travel and tourism sectors and
- (b) call on the government of Canada to revoke
 - (i) its proof of vaccination requirement for airline passengers and
 - (ii) its predeparture COVID-19 testing requirement for international airline passengers entering Canada.

And I think the latter has just happened recently. I think that speaks volumes to the effectiveness of the government motion as we're debating it and putting pressure on Ottawa to remove unnecessary restrictions. Maybe they're listening – I mean, I don't have a lot of belief that they are, but hopefully they are – and not just, of course, to the incredible people here in the Alberta Legislature but to many of the other experts in the domain of public health.

I know the hon. the Minister of Health spoke earlier and provided great insight into what national leaders are saying as it relates to COVID-19 policy and the need to move forward in removing unnecessary measures. I want to thank as well the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for his strong comments with respect to the airline industry. [interjection] I think the member wants to interject. If he does, happy to take an interjection.

Mr. Long: Thank you for giving way. I just heard your words about no measurable impact. I was wondering if you would like to take a brief moment to compare the cost of the restrictions for airline travel on the economy and the lack of measurable impact with the NDP-instituted carbon tax. I know that we've had that conversation a number of times about lack of measurables, about the cost on the economy. I was just wondering if you'd like to make comment on that.

Mr. Nicolaides: Yeah. I think that's a great example of something that's pretty useless, (a) the NDP carbon tax and (b) the travel restrictions that are in place currently. Of course, there's some

belief, I believe, from the federal government – and we know there was from the NDP – that their carbon tax and the federal rules regarding travel would have an impact, but we knew that that was not the case with the NDP carbon tax, and that's also the same case here as it relates to these travel restrictions.

Mr. Speaker, I don't want to go on for too long, so I'm going to try to be really succinct, and I'm just going to try and summarize my thoughts on the federal travel restrictions in as simple a way as I possibly can. When I think about the travel rules that are in place, one word, actually, comes to mind: pointless. I think that that's where we're ultimately at with these travel restrictions. I think they're ultimately pointless. We've seen data from around the world that the worst of COVID is behind us, so let's look objectively at the data.

Let's look at what's happening with respect to case numbers. I know the Minister of Health earlier provided the House an update. If I remember correctly, he said about 989 people in hospital and 70 people in ICU. I think that as we look at those numbers and we look at case numbers not just here in Alberta but around the world, we can see objectively that indeed the worst is behind us, and it's time to focus on getting our lives back to normal. [interjection] I'm happy to give way to the member.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you. To the minister, through you, Mr. Speaker, as the member also holds the title of Minister of Advanced Education, I wonder if he could speak to the impact of these ongoing restrictions in the realm that he oversees, advanced education, how that has had quite a significant detrimental effect on enrolment for our universities and colleges, our postsecondaries in general. I wonder if he could speak to their requests for stability so that they can begin to plan, hopefully, a much better year next year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing this intervention.

Mr. Nicolaides: Indeed, and thank you to the member. I think it is perhaps a good opportunity to provide some more information to the House. Many if not all of our postsecondary institutions – I don't have all the information in front of me at the moment; the member will have to forgive me. Most of our postsecondary institutions have taken similar steps as the government of Alberta has taken and as other jurisdictions have taken internationally in removing their restrictions. We've seen many of our postsecondary institutions remove their vaccine passport requirements, remove mask requirements because they understand and they see as well that it is indeed time to get back to normal.

As the member noted, I think it has been a challenging time for many students in our postsecondary system who have not been able to continue their studies or have faced disruption in their studies as a result of vaccination policies and rules. I know those individuals are eager to re-engage back into their academic learning and into their programs and get back on track. But, as well, many students are also interested in ensuring that we have a safe environment on campus, and that is indeed important.

I know of self-reported data from both the U of A and the U of C as examples. They did surveys and collected thousands of responses from their students and their faculty. In those surveys they noted incredibly high vaccination rates – 97, 98 per cent vaccination rates – so I think we can be very confident that we'll see safe and healthy campuses while at the same time not limiting others in progressing in their careers, in their lives, and in their academic journeys.

Again, to summarize, Mr. Speaker: pointless. These restrictions that the federal government has in place are nothing more than that. It is indeed time that we move forward. It's very clear that these

measures have no measurable public health benefit for Albertans or for Canadians. You know, there are a number of other experts who have attested to this, as the Minister of Health mentioned.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I don't know if you know, but do you know who Dominik Mertz is? I suppose it's a little bit of a rhetorical question. Perhaps the member from Lethbridge knows. Anyway, he is the division director of infectious diseases at McMaster University. In fact, I think that the Minister of Health mentioned him a little bit earlier. He's pointed out that PCR tests often deliver positive results for weeks after a COVID-19 diagnosis. Of course, when we're talking about prearrival COVID testing, you can see that there can be some challenges there. Again, I'm happy to see that the federal government has removed that element. We're down one, with one to go, and that's the removal of vaccination requirements for airline travel.

8:00

As well, that position that I just mentioned was reinforced by Irfan Dhalla, co-chair of the federal government's COVID-19 Testing and Screening Expert Advisory Panel. He noted that it simply doesn't make, quote, scientific sense to keep widescale omicron testing at the border.

Mr. Speaker, I always like to defer to the experts. I always like to look at the objective information. It seems as though everywhere we look, the experts are saying that these rules don't have any measurable impact, that they don't make sense, that we don't need them anymore. I'm always happy to defer to people who are smarter than me. These people certainly are. I have very little knowledge as it relates to infectious diseases. I know the members opposite will probably have a fun time with that statement. But I have very little knowledge when it comes to infectious diseases, so I'll listen to the experts, and I'll take their advice when it comes to putting COVID-19 policies in place or removing them, as many experts around the country are suggesting that we do.

However, the federal government seems to not want to listen to these experts. Why? I don't know. Maybe one of my colleagues or even members of the opposition, if they want to engage in debate this evening, can provide an answer to that question. I'm still searching for an answer to that. Why, in the face of this mounting evidence and this overwhelming consensus within the scientific community, does the federal government continue to have these rules in place? The only thing, regrettably, that comes to mind is politics and that the Trudeau Liberals want to try to use COVID-19 and travel restrictions and other measures for political purposes, which I think, if that's the case, is incredibly troubling.

Mr. Speaker, I don't know if you know who Perrin Beatty is either. Perhaps not, but I'm happy to give you that detail: the Canadian Chamber of Commerce president, who called on the federal government to offer a clear timeline for removing travel restrictions for fully vaccinated travellers and their children, including test isolation requirements and blanket travel advisories. In fact, in an interview he was on record saying, "Blanket warnings about travel at this point are unjustified." That's, again, the president of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, someone who I think understands full well the impact of COVID restrictions on Canadian businesses.

Mr. Speaker, perhaps I can have a quick time check. I'm not sure how much time I have left.

The Speaker: Seven minutes and 30 seconds.

Mr. Nicolaides: All right. Well, with seven minutes to go, I think I've made my point, so I don't know if I'll continue on, unless the member opposite – I see some members opposite I think want me

to continue on, so perhaps I will. I still have some notes here that I haven't fully gone over, but I think I have made my point broadly.

Again, this comes back to the main point here, which is the real challenge. Why do we continue to have these measures in place? Why do we continue to see the federal government continue to impose these measures when so many provinces in Canada and other jurisdictions around the world are removing their COVID-19 measures and moving towards getting life back to normal? Unfortunately, we see the federal government continuing to enforce these measures.

As I mentioned before, Mr. Speaker, I keep searching for an answer. I keep searching for the rationale as to why these measures are still in place. Maybe the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall has the answer to that. [interjection] I see the Member for Calgary-Klein wants to interject. Maybe he has the answer. I'm happy to give way.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: I don't know if I do have the answer, but in the spirit of the minister's comments earlier about ceding to somebody that might know more than him, I'm glad that he ceded to me for a few moments.

I guess just my thoughts were that this really isn't the first time that we've seen the federal government, this Prime Minister, go too far and kind of exceed his limits there. You know, I think maybe if we could go down kind of the path of where the Prime Minister has gone too far in the past, especially in the past couple of years, maybe if we went down that path, kind of exploring that in a little bit more detail, we might start to come to the idea of what his motivation might be and how offside he truly is.

Anyway, I'll give it back to the minister at this point. I do appreciate his comments so far.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, I appreciate that. That's a really helpful and interesting perspective. You know, it really helps to reframe things, and when you think about so many of those other pieces that we've seen come out of the federal government, perhaps the puzzle pieces start to fall into place.

Of course, we saw, as it relates to the federal government and their use of the Emergencies Act in an environment that was completely unnecessary and unjustified, that it was, I think, very concerning. I know that for many members on this side of the House it was a very concerning use of power and authority. I'm not sure about the members opposite. I know they're really close friends and allies, so I'm sure they would have been onboard, which is concerning, as I know the members opposite are on onboard with many of the other things that the federal government is doing currently, again, not listening to the experts and not listening to individuals, which comes with a carbon tax. As we all know, the federal government is slated to jack up the carbon tax on April 1, making life more expensive indeed.

Mrs. Allard: Jacking up fees.

Mr. Nicolaides: As the Member for Grande Prairie is stating, they never see a fee that they don't want to jack up, Mr. Speaker, and this is a clear example of it, especially with the carbon tax. I mean, if there's one thing that they can do, jack up the carbon tax, they'll do it. It's a top priority for the federal Liberal government.

We'll see that increase coming on April 1. I haven't heard a lot from the opposition when it comes to speaking out against that. It's really interesting because I do hear the members opposite talk at length about the cost of living and increases to bills and increases to costs of fuel and gasoline and many other things, but they never once have said that they will lobby the federal government to stop

the carbon tax hike that is slated to take effect on April 1. I mean, I'd love to see some consistency. If they're really concerned about the cost of living, one of the things that they can do is to work with us to call on Trudeau and the federal government to stop the carbon tax increase on April 1. It's pretty simple, it's pretty straightforward, but I haven't heard any of that from the members opposite, which is unfortunate.

To help address some of these things and to help address the issue of affordability, of course, we're removing the provincial tax, which will equate to 13 cents in savings per litre, as well as providing a rebate of \$50 per month for three months to households to help off-set some of the increasing costs of utility bills.

Mr. Speaker, I think I've highlighted the key points that I wanted to address this evening, so I'll end my comments there. Again, I just want to summarize overall my views on the matter and what I think about the restrictions and the measures that the federal government has in place: quite pointless. It's time to move on. It's time to look at the evidence, look at the signs. It's clear that we can move forward. It seems indeed that the worst of COVID is behind us. Let's get back to living life normally.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I'm sure that the hon. Minister of Advanced Education would be aware of chapter 7 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, that specifically speaks about the Speaker and other presiding officers of the House. They ought not be brought into the debate about what they may or may not know, who they may or may not know, certain experts or otherwise. I'm sure that the member knows and is very familiar with the chapter of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* that would imply that doing such things wouldn't be as appropriate as it may or may not be.

Are there others? The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore has risen.

Mrs. Aheer: Sorry. I was going to give it over to my lovely friend in the pink jacket across the way there, but I'll go first.

I just wanted to say thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to this motion. It's wonderful to be amongst my colleagues in here, to be able to breathe and to be together. It's been a long haul for people, especially those who have not been able to travel and see their families. I know that my colleague the Minister of Infrastructure and I both go to India every year to visit our families. We've missed funerals and weddings, moments of being able to mourn with our families and celebrate, see babies come into the world. It's a huge part of who we are. I don't mean to speak for the minister, but we're very, very connected that way, especially to our families overseas.

The ability to be able to do that and, you know, as we've come back together in our lives and in caucus and out in the world – I'm a musician, and I had my very, very first live concert in front of people two and a half weeks ago.

8:10

About a week before that, I was at another concert, of brass and strings, and it moved me to tears, Mr. Speaker, because that venue was full. It was full of people, just like how we sit beside our colleagues in here, shoulder to shoulder again now. I forgot what that felt like, and I hope that none of us ever have to go through that again.

As it relates to what's happening with respect to how we fly even within our country, we have to always think about the fact that right now we have large venues. We have hockey games that are sold out in our NHL. We're able to see our families play sports again and go

to ballet. I have tickets to *La Traviata*, that's coming up here, to the opera and whatever else I can get my hands on. The Rocky Mountain Symphony Orchestra is having their series coming up. If you like *Star Wars*, they're going to be playing *Star Wars* at their Balzac spot at the Polaris Centre. All of these things that I took for granted, that literally bring me to tears – and we are shoulder to shoulder, elbow to elbow in venues with singing, with horns playing, all sorts of things that have lots and lots of mist in the air from our breath, and we are so grateful to do that. We're so grateful to sit beside our colleagues.

We've been travelling for a long time in airplanes. If you think about how big Canada is relative to other countries, the distance that it takes to fly across our country and that our families have been separated for such a long time and about the mobility and the ability to have that mobility and the things that are stopping families from being able to see each other right now, we really have to consider what it is that we're doing.

I'd have to agree with my colleague the Minister of Advanced Education about what the experts are actually telling us now and also about something that we talk about and that is absolutely imperative and something that our associate minister of mental health and addictions has done this week, too, within the budget, which is funding mental health. The mental health shadow pandemic is something that we're going to be dealing with for years and year and years, more years than the pandemic ever cost us, and we have to take all of those things into consideration when we're making these rules and when we're making legislation.

What my colleague from Calgary-Fish Creek was talking about, when I came into this debate, was that fear itself is the biggest deterrent to our ability to see our best days ahead of us, and the economic needs of our province are one piece of it. But the reason why people come to Alberta, aside from our beautiful places and the people, is because our tourism is beyond imaginable. If you've ever had – and I've mentioned this before in the House, Mr. Speaker. I've had family come from India, and we've taken them to the hoodoos, and we've taken them to Banff. But we've also taken them to B.C., and we've taken them to see Saskatchewan. We've been blessed to be able to go out east and be able to visit that. We've never been able to take them out to the east coast, but that's definitely on my bucket list of things to do.

It's really, really time, Mr. Speaker, for us to be able to reconcile the great work that Canadians have done, what is necessary for our country to be able to see us see not only economic growth but growth as human beings and to find our humanity again. If it's fear that is going to stop us from seeing that success, then we really have to question our reasons for doing it.

When we look right now at what is happening in other parts of the world – and, again, I think we have to look at the fact that so many of our spaces are wide open. How is it that we define that COVID is going to be in one place and not in another? That's always been a very interesting question for me, because it doesn't really know any boundaries, as far as I know. If you look at the airline industry, for example – and, again, my colleague from Calgary-Fish Creek can speak to this much better than I can – the sector has done absolutely everything physically possible to keep their people safe, their clients safe. They're not even clients; they're family. If you talk about organizations like WestJet, many of the people who actually fly are also owners. There's so much that goes into that.

But consider this, Mr. Speaker. The airline industry, the travel industry, our tourism industry: they have been disproportionately impacted, obviously, by what has happened to us. But consider this: whose best interest is it in to keep us grounded, and whose best

interest is it in to stop our economy from bouncing back? If you think about it from that perspective, the airline industry and the sectors that are being most impacted have the most to lose. Why would we do more to impact them when they've done absolutely everything that they possibly can to keep us safe?

If there's more that needs to be done, I'm quite certain that the folks that are trying to keep us all safe, similarly to our restaurants, similarly to other sectors that were deeply impacted by restrictions to people's freedoms – why are we not having discussions about what they can do to open up as opposed to discussions as to why to keep them closed? It's a simple flip of the discussion and having a really, really honest discussion about how it is that we move forward. Really, that's what it's about. If we continue to live in fear and if we continue to use that as our justification for spreading that fear, the ones that will actually and truly be impacted by that are the people and particularly the people of Alberta.

I know I am – I can't speak for anybody else – extremely grateful for what we've all been through and how we have navigated this together. I've said this many times. For all of the frustration and rhetoric that we hear and what we go through, one of the most compelling things that I experienced throughout this entire pandemic was the grace, kindness, compassion, and understanding of the people of Alberta.

I have never seen – we created something called the Alberta VolunteerConnector, and that connector, when we lost our volunteers that were in our seniors' groups, because obviously they're a vulnerable population, especially through the initial waves, saw an influx of over 75,000 people come to the table to volunteer. This was before we had a vaccine. This was when we were just figuring things out. They put themselves into spaces in order to be able to help each other out. That is a spirit that you cannot create. That is one that has been grown here, that comes from generations of people, from those who've been here since time immemorial to those who just got off the airplane yesterday. [interjection] Oh, I'm so sorry. Thank you. He was waving at me, and I . . .

Mr. Neudorf: That's right. Thank you, through you, Mr. Speaker, to the member opposite. The member is obviously very compassionate. She speaks very highly of volunteers, as is right. I would ask that she share a little bit more of her experience and how that ties into the very nature of Albertans, the Alberta spirit, so to speak, that when things get difficult, we often see them rally together and come out in incredible numbers, donate incredible value both in physical goods and financial means. She's very connected, that member, to that community. I believe she was starting to share about that. I would just ask if it would be all right for her to share a little bit further on those experiences and how that helps everyone in this Chamber feel incredibly proud to be Albertan because of the very nature of the people that live and work here.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you so much for that intervention. I appreciate that so much. If we think about what the benefit is of our contributions to community, there is so much about what we do personally, how we give back, but the people who are impacted – I remember when we were just in the first and second waves. We were in Edmonton, and we'd gotten a call from the mosques here in Edmonton who were putting together baskets and organizing around their communities because Ramadan was coming up. We had declared the emergency, and then we were shortly into Ramadan after that. And we were doing – I can't even say we

because it wasn't us here in the Legislature; it was regular, severely normal Albertans out there that were seeing their elders feeling isolated. They had families that were being impacted by COVID. There was a tremendous amount of fear, and all of us, I think, in this House really felt that move towards wanting to be able to help out.

I'm just using the mosques as an example; there were churches and temples and gurdwaras and everything. It just kind of exacerbated, in the best way possible, where people were actively posting when somebody needed something from the store – I don't know if you remember this – and they would put Post-its out on their doorsteps. Somebody would come from one of these organizations, pick up the money from their little envelopes – the faith-based organizations are the ones that are coming to mind to me at first – and then go to the grocery store, grab their milk and whatever, and then come back home and leave it on the doorstep for the person to come out and get. Or do you remember when the grocery stores would open an hour early for seniors and then open an hour later? Then some of us were being engaged by our community members to go to Costco on behalf of – do you remember that fellow who was doing calisthenics outside of the Costco when there were those huge lineups going around the Costco?

8:20

I know that we've suffered so much, but those are the beautiful memories that I take with me. The reason I bring it up and why it's relevant to what we're talking about today is because to dampen that spirit and who we are as human beings and our humanity because of fear will do nothing other than continue a downward slide of mental health and will do nothing to help our economy, which by virtue ends up helping all of us to be able to do what we're supposed to do, whether that is protecting our vulnerable, whether that is people who are in isolation.

I remember in early July – I think it was Canada Day – when I was allowed to go into a seniors' home and visit. We were sitting all together when we had reached, I think it was, 70 per cent vaccination in the province. I remember all of those seniors sitting there. This was in Strathmore at Sagewood. They were all sitting there thinking: oh, my gosh; our families are going to be able to come visit us. It was a very telling moment because I'd been very lucky. I get to live and work here. I get to see my people. I was still out and about, but the people that we were protecting had been so isolated. The smiles on their faces that they were going to be able to see their grandbabies not through a window and then stopping us from being able to do that within Canada, not being able to see our nieces, our nephews, our grandbabies, our friends' children because of fear – lookit, Mr. Speaker, we all know what we've all been through.

I would hope by now that we understand the process. I have to have faith in the organizations and the corporations that are taking care of all of us that they're going to follow whatever protocols and necessary interventions that have to happen in order to keep the public safe. We've learned that. I think it's time for us to put faith in what we've learned, in the people who have been impacted, in the organizations and the corporations that are tasked with keeping us safe, whether we're up in the air or we're sitting in a restaurant with people. There is a deep learning and a deep respect and deep humility that comes from that kind of isolation that we've all experienced over the last little while. I think that taking that for granted and assuming that people are not going to take care of each other – the assumption has to always be that our first inclination would be to take care of each other.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, thank you. What you said is just so resonating with me, to the member, to hear your stories about the seniors' facilities and being able to get together with people. I know that you're also very engaged with the ethnic communities certainly in your community but across Alberta. You know, for myself, having been in the airline industry, having worked with communities, with the South Asian community, the Filipino, Vietnamese, you know, Chinese communities, the ability for them to travel back to the countries – this is their home country now – of origin for many of them is something that is, I think, if you've come from somewhere, made a new home, but you still have roots back where you came from, important for people. I talk to people in those communities all the time that have not been able to see their family. Maybe they go every year or every two years or every three years. But maybe they were just ready to go for that third-year trip, and now it's five years.

Thank you. Maybe just a few comments on that.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. I will respond. Well, it's interesting that you mentioned that. This is where the confusion comes in. We all know how confusing the protocols are. I have a friend who just travelled back. I saw them two days ago, and they were wearing masks in an event. I thought maybe they were nervous or, you know, they were sick. So I wasn't actually asking them about their masks, but they came up to me and they said: we have to wear masks because when we came in from overseas, we were told at the airport that we had to quarantine or we had to wear masks for 14 days. I remember thinking to myself, "Well, I thought that stuff had been lifted," but nobody knows the rules. There's so much fear, and there's so much concern.

I said to them, because I was obviously concerned that they weren't feeling well or that they were worried about the crowd of people that we were – I wasn't sure. Everybody has a right to wear a mask. Obviously, that's just fine. But when they told me that they were wearing masks because the rules had been stated to them literally two days ago as they entered into Canada, which is now their country of origin, that they had to wear masks and were potentially threatened with quarantine – this is why this is so important. I think motions like this are really, really imperative because it reinforces for all of us where we're standing and what needs to happen.

Lookit, all of us in this House understand how fuzzy the rules can be. We've all been caught up in various pieces of it. All of us have had questions at one point or another as to why the rules were the way they were. We have to be at a point now where we can provide some clarity to the people of Canada, especially, to my colleague's point, those who have been separated from their families for years now. None of us are getting any younger, and the children that are being born into our families and around the world, around the country, even, and all of those of us who sit in here – time is so precious. I say this with tremendous compassion. I have a friend who died three days ago from a pulmonary embolism, 61 years old, absolutely just out of the blue. Time is precious, folks.

I appreciate very much the difficult choices that all of us have had to make, and I'm especially grateful to the medical experts that have led us and have been guiding us along the way. But I just want to add that there is a fine balance, and at this point in our lives, where we are right now, nobody knows what their days are or where we're going to be tomorrow. I just personally – I must speak from my heart that it is imperative for me, my neighbours, my friends, my family, our province, across the country, the people that we love that we start putting our communities and ourselves back together, because it's going to take every single one of us to do that.

We can get lost in politics and rhetoric and language and who said what to who and what's going on – all of that is very reasonable at times – but at the end of the day that's not what we're going to remember. I certainly don't want to be defined by two years of what has happened and the absolute pain that people have gone through at that time. I would love for all of us to be able to be defined by seeing the light at the end of the tunnel and being able to see that and trusting the institutions and the organizations that we have tasked with keeping us safe up to this point.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on Government Motion 12, are there others? The Member for Grande Prairie has risen.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise this evening and join in the conversation around Motion 12. I'm just going to remind the Assembly what the motion says, that we

- (a) recognize that the current air travel restrictions imposed by the government of Canada have no measurable public health benefit and continue to impact hundreds of thousands of jobs . . .

I'm going to say that again: and continue to impact hundreds of thousands of jobs.

- . . . in the air travel and tourism sectors and
- (b) [that we] call on the government of Canada to revoke
 - (i) its proof of vaccination requirement for airline passengers and
 - (ii) its predeparture COVID-19 testing requirement for international airline passengers entering Canada.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that I have heard it in my constituency. I have talked to Albertans right across the province about some of the decisions that they've made. I think of seniors in my constituency that want to go and see a new grandbaby that's born. It's a barrier for them. It's a financial barrier for them to have to have a COVID test to go see their new grandson in Montana. It's stressful. It's the unknown. Some of these people don't travel very often, and I think it just adds another layer of complexity to an already stressful time.

I think that if the advice from officials was different, we would be in a different conversation right now, but there's large agreement, for the first time maybe in two years, that we need to learn to live with this and we need to move into the endemic phase of COVID. I'm grateful for that. I hope that we are able to collectively do that in a collaborative frame, but I think it's really important to recognize and to underscore not just the impact to industry and to those working in the sector, which is critically important, but also to the families that are affected.

I'm thinking of a family, actually, that I know. I won't name names, but I've talked to this family several times as an MLA in my constituency, and they're labelled as antivaxxers. I don't want to get into the whole debate about that. That's not really what I want to talk about. But one of the things that's heartbreaking is to hear the story behind some of those stories. This particular family: the husband had a vaccine a few years ago – I think he had a flu shot – and he came down with Guillain-Barré syndrome.

8:30

I don't know if anybody in this House knows what that is. I was unaware of what that was until my constituent educated me, but Guillain-Barré syndrome is a very critical illness that often occurs after a vaccine. There's more that they're studying to understand it. Guillain-Barré is no joke. There are people that die from it every year. It's incredibly debilitating. Within hours his lungs were filling with fluid. It can be very challenging for the doctors to diagnose.

Anyway, all of that to say, that long story – his doctor has told him that he cannot get the COVID vaccine because of his health history. He's told the children of this family – they have three teenage children – that they also cannot get the COVID vaccine. Now, this family, who has no choice, can't fly in their own country. They cannot get on a plane from Grande Prairie and go to Calgary. That doesn't make any sense. It's my understanding that there's no exemption. We've looked into it. We've tried to work with this family. To me, that doesn't make any sense, particularly now, when we know that there is large protection from vaccination right across our country and certainly right across our province.

I would like to thank the health care workers for their great work throughout the pandemic and working to help people make that decision in the best interest of their own individual health histories. But I think of families like that, who are caught in the crosshairs of policy like this, that is no longer defensible. We've heard the Minister of Health, we've heard the Minister of Advanced Education and multiple other members in this House tonight stand up and speak about where we're at and that there's no measurable reason or rationale to continue with this. Now, I never thought I'd say this in this House, but I will give the Trudeau government credit that today they did lift – or it's reported that they are about to lift the restriction to have a test before you enter back into Canada, and I think that's a step in the right direction. I think, as the Minister of Advanced Education pointed out, that's hopeful, that maybe they're listening to us tonight. I'm hoping that that's the case.

I wanted to quote Perrin Beatty. He's the president of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, and he's the co-chair of the Canadian Travel and Tourism Roundtable. He says:

We've seen the collapse of our international tourism and convention business over the course of the last two years . . .

The utter collapse.

. . . and were on the cusp of losing the summer tourist season [again] as well.

He's so thankful that these changes are happening. I don't think, if we had him here tonight, he'd be wanting to do anything but support this motion not only for the sector but for all those families that are affected as well. [interjection] Oh. I see the Member for Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to interject, I wonder if the member would – going back to some of the seniors and families that she knows, I know I've had some of these seniors in my constituency. When they go to travel, they don't have smart phones. They don't have apps. They don't have that ability to download the ArriveCAN app. Then they're really stuck because they're penalized by just not having that level of technology, not having the financial capability to buy a brand new smart phone and understand how to download these apps or codes or even upload their vaccination status. They're willing to comply. They want to comply, but it's a real hardship. I wonder if the member has members of her community that she could speak about that also have these kinds of challenges going forward with the restrictions put on by the federal government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Allard: Well, thank you. Thank you to the member for the interjection. I think it's a really good point. I mean, I spoke about one barrier, a family that really had no choice.

But I have witnessed actually first-hand, so I'll tell a little story about that. I was travelling for my role as an MLA. I was travelling actually to advocate for Alberta's energy back in the fall of 2021. There was a kerfuffle at the airport. I don't know what exactly was

going on, but there were a number of people in the lineup trying to get on this flight that were visibly stressed. One lady was in tears: I'm going to miss my flight. She didn't know what to do. She had a smart phone. But the ArriveCAN app, as it turns out, was glitching that day. By hook and by crook we figured it out, but this whole lineup of people was not going to be allowed to board the plane. I felt for the airline employee, who was dealing with an elevated level of stress already, dealing with restrictions that she did not impose, trying to help people be compliant and be COVID responsible and then having people screaming at her that they were not going to be able to board their flight and they were going to miss their connection or whatever else.

In some cases, to the member's point, to the member's question, you've got people who don't travel often. Maybe they've saved up to go see their new grandbaby, and maybe they've gone on their first trip in many years, and the technology and the demands and the shifting COVID restrictions and the lack of clarity – I think, to the point from the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore, that sometimes people just don't know what the rules are. It was very confusing and very stressful, and I witnessed it first-hand in that airport, people just at the brink. I think about all that stress and all that we've been through collectively as a society over the last two years, which I'm not blaming anybody for – it's a pandemic – but now that we're coming out the other side, I think that we can be compassionate, and I think we can move more quickly.

I wanted to talk a little bit about the impact of tourism as a sector on our economy. You know, we've talked a lot in this government . . . [interjection] Oh. I apologize. I see another intervention, Mr. Speaker. I'm so popular tonight.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Member, for giving way. Actually, I hoped that you were actually going to share a little bit. I know that Grande Prairie Regional Tourism recently rebranded. They had a new kickoff, and I know they have some exciting events planned, including an air race upcoming. I hope that I didn't interrupt what you were about to say, but I was hoping that you would discuss a little bit about how the thinning of the border is very important for your region in particular and the great work that is being done with Grande Prairie regional tourism.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the member for that great intervention. I wasn't going to speak about that specifically, but I'm happy to. I'm happy to speak about their rebranding and to thank the good folks in Grande Prairie Regional Tourism Association for their hard work and their resilience in the face of the challenges over the last two years and how difficult it's been, yet just like the good people of Grande Prairie do, they have risen to the occasion. I'd like to thank the member who intervened as well for joining me at the unveiling of their new strategic plan and their new logo. It's a very exciting time for them as they feel hopeful. You know, they feel hopeful for the first time, probably, in two years. They feel hopeful about the future. They feel hopeful about the possibilities and that they can actually make a difference in the economic reality of tourism in our province.

That said, back to tourism as a key sector to our economy. You know, in May 2020 the unemployment rate in the tourism sector in Alberta hit just shy of 30 per cent, which is a shocking, shocking statistic. Thankfully, to the member's point, it's only due to the hard work and ingenuity and resilience of those in the sector that it wasn't higher, quite frankly. They've seen some slow, slow gains, but it's not enough. I mean, they're still bleeding out. The reality is that with these restrictions the sector will continue to suffer and for no gain on the public health side. I think that's the point of the

motion. If there were tangible, measurable gains in public health, it would be defensible, but we are past the point where this is defensible.

You know, as we talk as a government about Alberta's recovery plan and, I would argue, by extension, Canada's recovery plan – I mean, if Alberta's got a sniffle, Canada's got a cold. I really believe that it's incumbent upon Alberta – as we recover, we're going to help Canada out of this challenging, challenging time of these last two years. It's incumbent that we fight for these jobs in this sector as well, not just for Alberta jobs but for Canadian jobs.

I mean, I would be remiss, especially given the last intervention, if I didn't talk about some of the beautiful places in Alberta that we would love to highlight to the world. We believe that the federal government needs to support the opportunity for others to partake in the beauty of Alberta and Canada. People from all over the world would love to fly here to see the beautiful views of the Rocky Mountains, to ski at Sunshine Village, my personal favourite, although I think that if you say that I'm skiing, you're being very generous. I fall down a mountain rather ungraciously, but I get there.

8:40

You know, there are people who could get married at the Fairmont hotel in Jasper, in the member's constituency, or go visit the biggest mall in North America. It actually isn't the biggest mall in North America anymore. If you go to Minnesota, they will tell you that. But we were the first biggest mall in North America, and that's what matters. We're still historic.

Mr. Speaker, I understand why these measures were originally implemented. I understand that COVID has been a fluid reality. I understand that it has been a challenge for every government, including this government, to manage because it has been fluid and dynamic and challenging. I understand that there still could be challenges ahead. I understand that. I also believe that we have to weigh that, as I believe this government has tried to do, with the viability for citizens. We have to be compassionate in the measures we impose, and they have to be defensible. I would argue that we are no longer in a place where they're defensible.

I would like to quote, actually, the federal Health minister, Jean-Yves Duclos. He says that Canada is looking to adjust restrictions, which is also, I think, good news. But why? Well, he says, "these tools," because they have more tools to deal with the pandemic now, as all governments do, after two years of managing this. We have more understanding. We have more scientific data. We have more research. We have more institutional knowledge about what works and what doesn't, what is the most effective in terms of treatment and intervention. He talks about these tools. He says:

These tools include the strong surveillance system, a highly vaccinated population . . .

Which we also have here in Alberta. Thank you to Albertans who've participated, who've been able to participate.

. . . continued access to vaccines, access to therapeutics both in and outside our hospital system and increasing access to rapid tests.

All of these things paint context around this motion. All of these things are part of the reality as . . . [interjection] Oh. I see the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you to the member for allowing an intervention. You talked about some of the businesses in your area, and I was just reading an article here from the IATA, the International Air Transport Association. They're predicting that the world's airlines will lose \$200 billion over the duration of this pandemic, wiping out nine years of profit. The IATA director

general, Willie Walsh, told a gathering of chief executives from the airlines: "People have not lost their desire to travel as we see in solid domestic market resilience. But they are being held back from international travel by restrictions, uncertainty, and complexity." When we secure that number, that \$200 billion, nine years of profits – maybe you could just reflect. You were talking about Grande Prairie tourism and some of your local tourism operators – I'm expecting that they're seeing that same thing, wiping out of nine years of profits and now having to get back on their feet – and how important these economies are to us. I'd like to hear your comments on that.

Mrs. Allard: Well, thank you again for the intervention. Mr. Speaker, I don't think I've ever been this popular, but I appreciate all of the interest in what I have to say this evening. I take the member's point. I really do. I'm a small-business person myself for the last 30 years. We know – right? – that when times are tough, as small businesses you eat that, and you hope to compensate that with the times that aren't so tough. But it's been hard, as an elected member governing through this challenging time, to watch businesses grapple. You know, I've had business owners in my constituency office really grappling with having to lay off employees. Like, that's devastating when they become your friends and they become people that you take a personal responsibility for, to think about how you're going to impact their families. That's just the personal level.

But at the macro level, which the member was talking about, billions of dollars on the table – I mean, I fundamentally believe that government's job is to create predictability and stability, to be as small as possible, and then to get out of the way. Unfortunately, with COVID-19 we haven't really had the luxury of predictable or stable. As I said earlier, it's been very, very fluid. We haven't had the luxury of being as small as we would like because there's been so much going on in terms of protecting our health care capacity.

You know, I actually hope and believe that we collectively, all 87 members of this Legislature, will come together in the name of learning from this pandemic. I believe the members opposite are interested in that and I believe that we are, too. I hold hope, Mr. Speaker, that we can work together to come up with what we learned and what we could do better going forward to leave a bit of a template for future administrations.

Further to that, I believe that it's incumbent upon us, as I was speaking earlier about Alberta's recovery plan, to fight for this sector as well. This sector in Alberta, tourism, is an important industry. In 2019 we generated around 6 and a half billion dollars, but from 2019 to '21 we've seen occupancy rates decline by 25 per cent and employment in the tourism sector decline by 14 per cent, and in one year, one statistic I gave, it was over 30 per cent. In Edmonton alone there was the generation of almost \$2 billion in 2019 for tourism. By 2021 this figure dropped by about 70 per cent. That's an astounding number. As a businessperson I cannot imagine facing a 70 per cent reduction in my revenue in a year. Canada's tourism sector was hit even harder.

I'll go back to the motion, Mr. Speaker. There's so much more that I could say. I'm shocked at how much I could talk about this because I really didn't think I could stand up here and talk this long, to be honest with you, but I really believe that I'm grateful for the strides and for the changes that the federal government has started to make. I just believe that this motion – it's incumbent upon us here in Alberta to call on the government to be more responsive and to be more expedient. There are jobs on the line. There's a whole industry and sector on the line.

I am proud to stand here as an elected member of Alberta's Legislature and support this motion and support the good men and women that work in the tourism sector. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: On Government Motion 12 are there others?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 12 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 8:47 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Long	Orr
Allard	Lovely	Panda
Barnes	Luan	Reid
Copping	Madu	Rowswell

Ellis	McIver	Sawhney
Gotfried	Neudorf	Sigurdson, R.J.
Hanson	Nicolaides	Smith
Issik	Nixon, Jeremy	Stephan
Loewen		

Against the motion:

Carson	Feehan	Sabir
Eggen	Loyola	

Totals:	For – 25	Against – 5
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[Government Motion 12 carried]

The Speaker: Perhaps the chief government whip has a motion to make.

Ms Issik: I move that the Assembly be adjourned until 1:30 p.m. Thursday, March 17.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 9:04 p.m.]

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