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First Session

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Thursday morning, October 10, 2019

Day 26

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

First Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Thursday, October 10, 2019

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good morning, hon. members. I'd like to recognize that there is a wide range and varied amounts of faith and cultural backgrounds, so please feel free to pray or reflect in your own way.

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

Orders of the day. Ordres du jour. You may be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice, Solicitor General, and Deputy Government House Leader has caught my eye this morning.

Canadian Armed Forces Health Care Funding

33. Mr. Schweitzer moved on behalf of Mr. Jason Nixon:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly denounce the federal government's decision to reduce the rates at which it reimburses the costs of providing health care services to Canadian Armed Forces members, call on the federal government to immediately reverse this decision and provide the highest level of treatment for these members, and recognize the contribution of these members, who bravely and willingly risk their lives for our country.

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, it's my honour to rise to move Government Motion 33 on behalf of our Government House Leader.

This is completely unacceptable. Our government stands with our military families. This is again another outrageous attempt by the Trudeau Liberals to push costs down. This is unacceptable. Our military folks put their lives on the line every single day with what they do for us. They deserve our respect. They deserve proper funding. They deserve proper care. It's unacceptable, and Trudeau needs to take this back.

The Speaker: This is a debatable motion according to Standing Order 18(1)(a), and all members have the opportunity to speak. Would anyone like to join in the debate this morning? The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the deputy House leader from the government side bringing forward this motion to denounce the federal government's decision to reduce rates at which it reimburses the costs of providing health care services to the Canadian Armed Forces members and call on the government to reverse this decision.

Now, certainly, our caucus, the New Democrat Official Opposition caucus, does recognize the right for all individuals to have access to top-quality public health care, not just in this province but right across the country. Indeed, this is a cornerstone

of who we are as Albertans and Canadians. We recognize that public universal health care, which is afforded to military families and to all families here in the province of Alberta and the country, is an important way by which we can ensure the safety and the health, physical and mental health, of all people but also the financial integrity of all people and families here in the province of Alberta and across the country to ensure that all Canadian residents are protected from two-tier, American-style private health care. Our veterans deserve the respect, and they deserve proper health care. They should be cared for in the right way.

We know that the previous Conservative federal government under Stephen Harper eliminated pensions for the Canadian Armed Forces, which we found to be deplorable, unacceptable considering the important work that our Canadian Armed Forces do to protect our borders, to protect the integrity of our country. Now it appears that the federal Liberals are rolling back the health care supports for our Canadian Armed Forces. Indeed, we know and I think everyone knows, within both their hearts and minds, that this is wrong. This decision goes against the basic principle of protections for all citizens but particularly for Canadian Armed Forces, who are often in very dangerous circumstances. It is our position as well that this funding should be immediately restored.

From what we have read from media sources and indeed from talking to people and drawing on our own well of common sense – right? – we are disturbed that the federal government would seek to cut corners when it comes to health care for our Armed Forces personnel in this country. We should be looking for ways by which we can increase the scope of health care for Canadian armed service members and indeed all citizens in the country to ensure that we have in place, for example, a national pharmacare program that ensures that we are all protected as citizens along with Canadian Armed Forces from private profiteering on pharmacy here in the province of Alberta and across the country as well.

We know that Canadian Armed Forces members and indeed all citizens of Canada need and require an increased scope of mental health supports as well. We have looked through the original intention of the universal health care protections and know that it should be an evolutionary process, and that includes what we know now that we perhaps didn't know when we first brought in medicare, that mental health supports are indeed at least as important as the physical supports that medicare does afford us.

I think we believe strongly as well and I think that scientific evidence does support that universal dental care is an absolute necessity over time to ensure the overall physical health of all citizens, including Canadian Armed Forces. We know that the connection between good dental care and affordable protected public dental care should be under the umbrella of medicare programming and other supports as well to ensure that we're not just stuck in a static mode around the benefits of public health care but indeed we are moving forward to ensure the health and safety of all citizens in the province and in the country. Particularly, this flashpoint for our military veterans is a good place for us to remind ourselves of how important it is to invest in health care.

You know, I can't help but think, Mr. Speaker, that there is an element of irony with the government bringing forward a motion such as this because, of course, yes, we should ensure that our Armed Forces are protected in all ways for comprehensive medical supports, but then it's coming from the same government right now that has their eyes firmly targeted on reducing health care, universal and public health care, here in this province of Alberta. I don't look any further than the newspaper and the very disturbing reports out of Vegreville, Alberta, over these last few days, where a long-term care assisted living facility has made a choice to fire their entire staff at an assisted living facility and allow the severe reduction in

services and pay for an essential assisted living facility that looks after our seniors, both their physical and mental needs, in the town of Vegreville. I can't help to think that this somehow is a precursor from a signal that this government has sent to say, you know, that all bets are off; go ahead and start this process of privatization of the compromise in health care that I think almost all Albertans would find both unacceptable and abhorrent as well.

I look, again, to this government's decision to cancel the lab services contract that indeed was building, in fact, a very, very comprehensive, important facility, which is a cornerstone of good public health care, and cancelling that, thus delaying the proper and timely execution of lab services here in the province of Alberta, which again is very sadly and importantly needed here at this time. Instead we see quite the opposite, which is a series of cuts.

Why is this all happening, Mr. Speaker? Well, I can't help but say that, you know, it all comes down to the budget, and we see a budget coming down on October 24, which is none too soon. I can't help to see that there is at least a \$4.5 billion hole in that budget that this government chose to make in order to give big corporate tax cuts to corporations at the expense of health care, at the expense of education and other public social services and infrastructure that this government is responsible for.

9:10

I think it's very important to ensure that our military is looked after and that military families are looked after. I think it's a prescient and very timely opportunity to talk about the importance of public health care for all citizens and all people that live in the province of Alberta and in Canada as well and to see how those services are in peril and put in peril by the same government who brought forward the same motion here today.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Housing has risen to add to the debate.

Ms Pon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the Minister of Seniors and Housing the responsibility of the military liaison portfolio falls under my ministry. When I was made aware of Justin Trudeau and the federal government's decision to reduce the rate at which they reimburse the cost of providing health care services to the Canadian Armed Forces members, I was thoroughly disappointed. This decision is disrespectful and deceitful given that Trudeau has campaigned on his commitment to expand medicare.

You may remember that in February 2018 injured veteran Brock Blaszczyk asked a question to Justin Trudeau at a town hall hosted at Grant MacEwan. Mr. Blaszczyk had served in Afghanistan for less than a year when he was injured in an explosion and lost his leg. Mr. Blaszczyk addressed his concern with Ottawa's plan to reform some veterans' programs, including changes to disability pensions, and asked Mr. Trudeau: why are we still fighting against certain veterans groups in court? Well, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Trudeau responded: because they're asking for more than we are able to give right now.

The insolence toward our Canadian Armed Forces that the federal government is placing upon the men and women who serve to protect our country is not how they should be treated. Our government will honour the access to care in Alberta and not respond the way that Mr. Trudeau has. We will protect our Canadian Armed Forces members.

I commend our Minister of Health for writing a letter to the Minister of National Defence to call for a reversal of the decision to unilaterally cut reimbursement rates for delivering health care to our members in the Canadian Armed Forces in Alberta and across

Canada. The new rates will lead to a shortfall of \$2 million. That \$2 million will affect the fundraising source that our province relies on to provide the best care for our Canadian Armed Forces. The Department of National Defence will not share their rationale for the new rate, and the rate was imposed without any consultation.

As the Minister of Health stated, our government will step up and fully cover the costs of health care for our Canadian Armed Forces so that all members in our province receive the care that they need. We will not leave those who fight and fought so bravely for our country in purgatory.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Is there anyone that would like to make a brief question or comment?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday caught my eye.

Mr. Ellis: Under 29(2)(a), sir.

The Speaker: Oh, sorry. I didn't see you there.

Mr. Ellis: I'm sorry. I apologize for being late.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-West has risen under 29(2)(a).

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, I just want to under 29(2)(a) take a moment here to thank the minister for standing up on behalf of certainly the government and the portfolio which she represents, Seniors and Housing. I'd just like to ask her, since the military liaison officer, which is, I believe, the Member for Leduc-Beaumont, falls under her ministry, falls essentially in her portfolio, what kind of impact the officer has had on the community which he's been engaging the last several months.

This decision that was made by the federal government: maybe expand a little bit on we'll call it the impact on our military members who are stationed here in Alberta and what the military liaison officer has been doing to talk to our military veterans and friends to let them know that we as a government are here for them, that we as a government are going to continue to support them even when the perception is coming from the federal government that that might not be the case.

Since this is a very important portfolio that falls under her ministry, if she can just expand on some of the conversations that she might have had with the military liaison officer and, certainly, some of the veterans and current service members who have been impacted by this decision. Thank you, sir.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday on the main motion.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today to speak to this motion. Of course, I'll just read it over here one more time. "Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly denounce the federal government's decision to reduce the rates at which it reimburses the costs of providing health care services to Canadian Armed Forces members." I'll leave it at that.

Now, I of course will be supporting this motion as well as the rest of my colleagues, I believe. Our NDP caucus, when we were in government, took the issue of supporting our veterans very seriously, and I do also want to recognize the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs for her work as the military liaison. Through consultations with veterans and with the Armed Forces in this province, we were able to move forward on a housing and

service centre for veterans, funding \$3 million towards that, which was very important in terms of recognizing the importance of making sure we're respecting and supporting mental health concerns and homelessness concerns that often do happen with our veterans.

I do also want to recognize the fact that there is irony in this motion, as was mentioned by the Member for Edmonton-North West. The fact is that this Premier, when he was a federal minister – for a time he was the minister of defence – failed our veterans, simply failed them horribly. I want to recognize – it was mentioned – the fact that under Stephen Harper and this Premier, when he was in the federal government and was a minister, killed pensions, eliminated pensions for our veterans. We're talking about, you know, a downloading of services from the federal government. When we look back at the history of the federal Conservative government and the attacks that they've placed on our veterans by removing the rights to those pensions for injured and disabled veterans, those veterans lost between 30 and 90 per cent of their entitlements, which is very concerning. Once again, it's quite ironic, if not completely hypocritical, for this government to try and stand up and say that they are the champions of veteran supports while their history and their legacy says something quite different.

Also, looking back on the history of the federal Conservative government when they were in power: closing nine Veterans Affairs offices; another big concern. Those shutdowns laid off 89 employees, leaving eight workers to cover 17,000 veterans, once again showing a complete disrespect and lack of understanding about the supports that these veterans need. My question is: you know, it's wonderful that you're standing up for veterans now, but where was this Premier when he was in the federal government representing these veterans? It's very concerning.

9:20

Now, I also want to recognize the fact that while this government is complaining or concerned, rightfully so, that the federal government is talking about downloading services to the provincial government – and I'm happy to recognize that the minister of seniors said that they would cover these costs, which is good. It's important that we take care of our veterans. But they stand before us in this Legislature talking about a \$4.5 billion handout to large corporations. What does that mean for regular Albertans? That means that they are going to have their services cut. Now, when we talk about supporting the families of veterans and veterans themselves, what is going to happen when funding for education gets cut? What happens when funding for FCSS gets cut, when we start denying more applications for these families that desperately need this funding?

Once again, on the other hand, we talk about the \$4.5 billion handout to large corporations. That is going to mean – and we've seen it through the discussions with this Justice minister about the downloading of policing costs, in just one instance, on municipalities. On one hand, we have this UCP government saying: we're very concerned that the federal government is talking about downloading costs to the provinces. Then, on the other hand, we have this provincial government talking about downloading many services onto municipalities, which is very concerning. They're talking out of both sides of their mouths, Mr. Speaker. I think it's very unfortunate. I think that they should do the right thing on that matter and fully fund these municipalities.

Once again, I do plan on supporting this motion. I think it's important to show our support to these veterans. I think that when this Premier was in the federal government, he should have done a better job because, at the end of the day, he failed veterans

miserably, and now he's trying to make up for it through a motion. Well, it's just not enough, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Is there anyone else that has a question or a comment? I see the hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat would like to ask a question or make a brief comment.

Ms Glasgo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to point out how important this motion is. I mean, this is a motion where we are calling on the federal government, coming together in camaraderie to call out the action of the federal government and their failure to stand up for our veterans when it comes to access to health care. Instead of doing that, the opposition has taken this time to play politics with this motion. I think that's actually quite despicable considering that we're talking about people who are not asking for more than we can give. We are talking about people who put their lives on the line every single day for our country. Instead of doing that, we're going off on a tangent about irrelevant topics, I would argue, and we are not actually talking about the issue at hand here, which is access to health care for these veterans.

I would implore the members of the opposition, when speaking to this motion, to speak about this as an issue that affects everyone in every constituency. This is not a partisan motion. It happens to be brought forward by the government, but this is an issue that I think we can all get behind just because it is so important and it is so relevant. I know that the members of the opposition care about this topic, and I would not want these previous comments to cloud that, because I do think that this is an extremely important topic. I'm going to give the Member for Edmonton-West Henday the benefit of the doubt here when I know that he wasn't trying to play politics with this issue. I know that he wasn't trying to make a partisan issue out of something that really should be nonpartisan, because that would be, I think, a little bit beyond the pale on this issue. I would give the Member for Edmonton-West Henday, I guess, a second to respond, maybe apologize to the House for playing politics with this issue, and speak on behalf of his constituents when he's coming at the government for something that should really be a nonpartisan motion.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday, should he choose to respond.

Mr. Carson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Once again, I do want to respect the fact and respond to the fact that I am going to be supporting this motion. I think it's an important motion. I made it quite clear that I am in full support of our Canadian Armed Forces. You know, the work that they do really should be thanked more than it does get thanked by every level of government.

One more time, I mean, the member just raised the fact that I'm making this a partisan issue. This motion itself: of course, we're all going to be supporting it. But it is a partisan issue when the federal government, the federal Conservatives over the last several years before this Liberal government, failed veterans. It is a partisan issue when Stephen Harper failed them so miserably, took away their pensions, closed Veterans Affairs offices, kept them in court. Now, it's the exact reason why in 2015 veterans across Canada raised a campaign and lobbied against the federal Conservatives, recognizing that they failed them miserably. You can't, you know, as a government, as a federal government, a Conservative government completely fail veterans across the province for decades and then say: oh, how could you hold that against us?

All I'm saying is that I'm supporting this. I think that we definitely can do more, especially the federal government could do

more. I just have to recognize the fact that the federal Conservatives failed. It's as simple as that. I think the Member for Edmonton-North West raised good points about the fact that we need to move forward on universal health care, whether it's dental or other matters. I think that the Conservatives failed on that, too. I hope that a federal government in the future will look at fixing that issue, whether it's for veterans or for all Canadians.

But the fact is that any time we enter this room, it is politics. It is an issue of whether the Conservatives are going to stand up for veterans at the federal level and frankly they didn't. I'll leave it at that.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, there's approximately a minute and eight seconds left under 29(2)(a).

Unfortunately, you've already spoken once, so it would be inappropriate for me to ask you again.

If there's anyone else – oh, check that. Feel free.

Ms Glasgo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. member for giving me a minute and eight seconds to finish my thoughts. You know, we do come into this place from a political lens, of course, and that is important to remember. But I do remember hearing from the opposition side on a variety of issues, especially the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, about how we need to rise above politics, that we need to rise above partisanship. This is one of those sections where we can rise above. It really amazes me that the opposition is just like the federal Liberals in this regard, where they're actually campaigning against Stephen Harper instead of standing up for Albertans right here, and I think it's despicable. I would just implore the opposition to advocate for Albertans. I would implore the opposition to advocate for their constituents instead of coming at us on issues that really should be nonpartisan.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Now there are eight seconds remaining. The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West, if he'd like to join in the debate.

Mr. Eggen: No, thank you.

The Speaker: I'm so happy for your keen observation of the timer.

Hon. members, I have just recently noticed the presence of military veteran Brock Blaszczyk in the gallery this morning.

I'd like to welcome you here. Thank you for your service and your attendance this morning. [Standing ovation]

Hon. members, is there anyone else that would like to speak to the motion? I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In a few short weeks Canadians from coast to coast to coast will pin poppies to their chests for 11 days in November. Some of us will attend our local Remembrance Day ceremonies. Some of us will lay a wreath at our community memorial. Some of us will talk to a veteran, shake their hand, pose for a picture. But what will happen on November 12? We remember our veterans and active service members for 11 days in November. We recite the lines of *In Flanders Fields*. We let silence ring instead of gunshots. We pledge that we will hold the torch for those who threw it from falling hands. Will we fail them again on November 12?

I raise this question and stand in this House today because it is so easy for all of us to remember our veterans and their service and our active service members in November. We gather together in their memory and honour their service across the country. For that moment of silence on November 11 the active service members and

veterans in this country are all that we care about. However important our ceremonies and our decorations and our acknowledgements are on November 11, Mr. Speaker, I'm asking everyone to think about November 12. It is easy to pay attention to the issues veterans raise with us when they are at the forefront of our minds, but if we don't continue to value the contributions of our service members on November 12 and every day after that, our words and our actions on November 11 ring hollow.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in this House today because our veterans and active service members deserve a government that remembers their sacrifice and everything that they do, not just on Remembrance Day but on every single day that we remain a strong and free nation, almost entirely because of the sacrifices that Armed Forces members made for generations before us. We cannot fail to consider their sacrifices in everything that we do and every policy that we make. That is why I'm shocked that our federal government would so blatantly disregard their actions in context with their consequences to everyone who wears this country's uniform and why I am standing in the House to advocate for them and demand that our federal government make our veterans and serving members a priority.

9:30

The stories and experiences of our veterans and serving members go far beyond Remembrance Day, Mr. Speaker. There are people who have served in the reserve force in this very room, as we just acknowledged, and people who have served in the regular forces who walk our halls here at the Legislature. The sacrifices they have made and the experiences they have gone through stay with them for longer than just the first 11 days in November. They live with the burden of memories, both nostalgic and difficult, that we could help them carry if only we chose to make their burdens easier or share them.

We talk a lot about how thankful and proud we are of our serving members. I have no doubt that there is sincerity and truth in those words when they are spoken in this House. However, how can we continue to pile on the platitudes if they are served by a federal government that doesn't remember their service for the other 354 days of the year? I have heard first-hand some of the struggles that our veterans face.

These brave men and women who make the choice to sacrifice everything for the rest of us frequently struggle with matters that they shouldn't be worried about. Far too often our military members face difficulties transitioning back to civilian life or coming back from a long and challenging deployment. While their service means everything when they wear the uniform, it means less on their resumé when they try to find a civilian job. When they come home after serving domestically or overseas, we greet them with hugs, cheers, and flashy signs, but the pomp and circumstance fade from day to day.

Symptoms of job-related risk often don't appear until far after the incidents that happen at work, Mr. Speaker, and many of us can testify to that. Our military members work marathon hours under high stress and are often working with dangerous materials. I recently heard the story of someone who has served and has been exposed to various chemicals throughout his career. A standard risk to the job, he told me, and his hands shake uncontrollably at random. He can't pin it back to an exact event during his military career, but he thinks the repeated chemical exposure to heavy diesel and other industrial fluids could have something to do with it. He worries about what caused it and what it might mean for his future family. There are many stories like this. They aren't uncommon.

These are young people in our Armed Forces, and they are breaking down their bodies for this country and asking not much in

return, nothing except for consideration and for us to make sure their families are cared for. Now the federal government has given them one more reason to feel overlooked rather than giving them reasons to feel respected and heard.

We cannot stand idly by while our military members and veterans are treated as second-class citizens. We must stand together in recognizing and honouring their contributions. Most importantly, we must stand up for them and their futures. We must refuse to accept that cutting away more of their thin benefits is acceptable in any way.

I would ask that everyone in this House not only join me in standing up for our service members and veterans today but join me in standing up for them every day. A legacy and a career isn't lived in 11 days in November, Mr. Speaker. We have 354 more days that we must use to continue to honour their sacrifices.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a question or comment for the Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Neudorf: East.

The Speaker: East.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to rise and speak to this important motion. I would just like to start off by saying that I will be supporting the motion, and then I just want to give a little bit of background.

I was a military partner for many years. I lived in Griesbach. I worked in Lancaster Park. My partner at that time was part of the PPCLI as a sig op and was in Afghanistan, so I appreciate the importance of this issue. I've lived as a supportive partner with my partner being overseas, and I recognize the military family and the importance of the military family. We had a community when we were living in Griesbach, before it became the Griesbach that it is now, where there were many of us that all lived in the row houses together, and when our partners were overseas, all of us would get together and support each other and talk about the stresses of having our partners in combat zones. During the time when my partner was in Afghanistan was when we had our major loss of our members from PPCLI that passed away in 2006. That had a significant impact on our community. Obviously, we were all around the same age at that time, and we all knew each other.

When I hear the members say, "Well, take the politics out of it," I hear what you're saying. The reality of it is that, you know, there are people in this House that are substantially impacted by this issue, that have strong beliefs. I have strong beliefs about the fact that our military families deserve support by all levels of government. I'm not just talking federal, provincial, but municipal as well.

When I worked in Lancaster Park, my focus was on working with families that had children with disabilities. I worked at FSCD, and all the families that were on my caseload deliberately moved from other provinces to Edmonton and to Lancaster Park or wherever because of the fact that the provincial government at that time had made an effort to recognize that there are additional stressors for military families outside of just service. There are children involved. There are spouses involved. My caseload was quite high because many families came from Ontario and other provinces to get the supports for their children that were struggling with developmental disabilities, physical disabilities.

Health care is extremely important to the military families. It's important to all Albertans. Mental health supports. I mean, when

we lost our members in Afghanistan, it hit the community extremely hard, and it wasn't just about the individuals that had retired and the veterans. It was about members that were actively engaged in combat. It was family members that were part of those conversations. I mean, I'm sure we all remember when we filled Rexall for the ceremonies. It was hard. This conversation around health care supports: ultimately we all have a responsibility to take care of our military families, to recognize the service that veterans have contributed to Canada and internationally around this world.

But the reality of it is also that this motion was put forward to have this dialogue, and it was put forward for a political reason. I just caution everyone that throwing stones back and forth around one side making this more political than the other – well, we're having this conversation for political reasons or else we wouldn't have the motion on the floor. Honestly, the Alberta government, the minister could just fix it right now without us having to have this conversation.

I think that we all need to take a moment and recognize that there is a game being played right now. We all know we're in a federal election, and that is why this motion is even being put forward. The reality of it is that we can all do better. We can all serve our military families better. The fact that the military families in this country live in different provinces and travel around the world, travel to different places – I still have many friends that have moved every two years to a different posting, and every single time they move, they are impacted by the health care that is provided in different provinces, by the services, by the fact that there are struggles with retraining, that their spouses have to relocate and find new careers.

Those issues are real, so absolutely we should support this motion, but the reality of it is that we should just be able to do this without a motion. It should just happen. We shouldn't be standing up here and having this debate and going back and forth about whether or not it should be done. Yes, the federal government is downloading costs onto the provinces to cover military health care, but the reality of it is that the minister could just fix it right now, right? Like, why are we even having the conversation? If you don't want to hear the fact that there are other things that can be changed, that historically we have failed the military federally, that historically decisions were made by federal Conservatives, and things are being made by federal Liberals right now that impact military families – that is true. But the government decided to put a motion forward to discuss it, and we can't just discuss the one thing that the government wants to talk about, which is what the federal Liberals are doing, if they're not going to acknowledge what happened in the past with the federal Conservatives. If this really wasn't about politics, if this is really about caring about our military families, caring about the people that are serving our country, caring about the family members that have been impacted by the sacrifices that these families make, then this conversation shouldn't even happen, and this government shouldn't have put this motion forward, because it does impact people.

9:40

I'm sorry that I'm getting a little worked up about this, but, like, I've lost people that served. My ex-partner is impacted with mental health issues because of what he experienced while he was in Afghanistan. He had one of the hardest jobs. He's a sig op. It's a pretty sketchy job to have; all of them are. But the reality of it is that I am impacted to this day by his service because I still care about him and all of my friends and all of the experiences that they've had and the mental health issues and the PTSD and all of the other dynamics that have come because of what they've seen in Afghanistan and all of the other places where they've served.

So I'd just ask that instead of throwing stones back and forth, you acknowledge the fact that you put the motion forward. Therefore, talking about the whole gamut of what federal governments have done for our military, whether it be Conservative or Liberal, is part of the dialogue because you chose to put the motion forward. I thank our members that have served. I remember them every day. It's not about Remembrance Day for me. I will support this motion, but I ask that in the future, if we really want to do what's right, then we don't bring it to this House and the ministers just do what they should do.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West has risen to ask a brief question or comment.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I sincerely thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning for bringing up a couple of very important points. It was actually something I was thinking about, too, because my constituency, Edmonton-North West, has many military families living there. People were transferred from different parts of the country – New Brunswick, Quebec, and Ontario – and often in conversation it's not uncommon for people to point out specifically that they were seeking a posting in the province of Alberta because of the enhanced medical benefits and social service benefits that they could access for themselves and for their families. You know, it always stuck with me over the years.

I'm sorry I didn't ask the hon. member before. I know you have some more information about that. Again, I know that her comments were very poignant and so forth, and I wanted to ask her about – well, first of all, I think that this motion is relevant because it brings up an important point about how we have built comprehensive public health care and social services that are recognized and sought out by Canadians in other parts of the country in the military service, and they might even choose to try to get a posting here in Alberta to access those services. If she could perhaps tell us about some of those services that people did want and desired and found to be excellent here in the province of Alberta and how those same services might be in jeopardy here now with the prospect of cuts to social services and health care. If she would choose to answer that, I would appreciate it.

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

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yeah. I mean, we know, again going back to my experience working in family support for children with disabilities, FSCD, the military families that I was working with in Lancaster Park – of course, lots of people live in northeast Edmonton. I have lots of military families that I represent in my riding now. I mean, there is a great benefit that we have in the fact that we do have supports for children with disabilities in this province. FSCD is one of the best programs, I think, across the country when it comes to supporting children that have additional medical needs, that need additional interventions or community aids or daycare aid.

The one thing that I would like to acknowledge is the MFRC, the military family resource centre, in Lancaster Park. The work that they do is amazing. They have an on-site daycare. They're always open to working with FSCD and making sure that there are aids in place for the children that go there. They offer additional supports. I know that the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs and I go to their fundraiser every year. There's always a great community turnout to support the resources that are being provided. They also provide mental health supports and then, of course, community referrals for those that don't want to access services on-base.

Again, going back to my comments around ministers just needing to do the right thing – making sure the military resource centres, making sure that the supports in FSCD continue to be funded, making sure the daycare aids are in place, \$25 daycare is in place, all of the things that support healthy communities and healthy families – if we're going to talk about military families and their health care needs, they also deserve all of the community supports that they have a right to access. When you look at your budgets and you're having conversations around how we are going to do cost savings, I implore you that if you're going to say that this is an issue and that we need to have funding for military families, then you have to fund everything else, too.

You can't pick one issue with military families and say, "This is the issue," because then you're politicizing it. Acknowledge the MFRCs. Acknowledge the fact that resources on-base need to be funded and supported. If you're going to advocate for that, then you have to advocate for on-base resources and off, and that includes making sure that families on-base have all the supports that they need. And even if they live off the base: I mean, the access to child care, the access to training and being able to look at that when transitioning from a military career, that those skills are transferable to employment.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health has risen to join the debate.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a consideration in this House, an amendment to Government Motion 33.

The Speaker: The pages will grab it. Just have a seat for two seconds if you wouldn't mind, Minister.

Mr. Shandro: Okay.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the amendment will be considered to be amendment A1.

The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The amendment that I'm asking the House to consider right now is striking out "call on the federal government to immediately reverse this decision and provide the highest level of treatment for these members" and substituting "call on the federal government to immediately and fully reverse this decision, commit to no future changes, and provide the highest level of treatment for these members." Is it all right if I then speak to this amendment?

I just want to say a few words generally. You know, I think that before this became an issue, most people probably didn't realize that the federal government pays for the health care services of our forces' personnel who are here in Alberta, mostly because when you are personnel for our Armed Forces, you don't get to choose where in this country you serve. You're told where you're going to be living. You're told where you're going to serve, and you're sent there.

Outside of the Canada Health Act, the federal government, the Department of National Defence have paid the provinces for those health care services. Typically, like here in Alberta, the Department of National Defence has a primary care network themselves to provide primary care from those physicians, but this is really dealing with the acute care and scheduled surgeries that are required to be provided to our forces' personnel here in Alberta through Alberta Health Services in the same way as if there was somebody from another jurisdiction, like B.C., who got acute-care services here in Alberta. AHS would be able to essentially send an invoice to the Department of National Defence for the acute-care services

or the scheduled surgery for those personnel. Historically, what was paid to the provinces were amounts which covered those costs.

9:50

Without any consultation and still to this day without any answer about the rationale for this decision, unilaterally the Department of National Defence cut the amounts that they're going to be paying for those services. Sure, in the grand scheme of things it may not amount to what sounds like a lot of money. I think the total hit to AHS would be about \$2 million per year. But first, Mr. Speaker, it's disrespectful towards the provinces that this happened without any consultation. It's disrespectful to the provinces that we still do not have an answer for the rationale. It's also hypocritical that the Trudeau government wants to talk about expanding medicare, yet unilaterally they make a decision like this to cut the funding to Alberta Health Services for this.

It's also disrespectful to the forces' personnel. I think the most important thing for us to be able to say in this House is, first, to everybody who can hear these words: if you are forces' personnel serving here in Alberta, understand that your care will not be altered in any way. You will still get the care that you need from Alberta Health Services and from Alberta Health. You will still be able to get the care that you need, and in no way should you have ever, ever heard any of these words and have had to question whether you are going to receive these services. I apologize to any forces' personnel who have had to make that inquiry. Please understand that you will still get the services that you require.

It is disrespectful to them, Mr. Speaker, and I think that this is the time for the Trudeau government to not double down on their decisions but to be able to reverse those decisions and make sure that it's clear to our forces' personnel and to our provinces that decisions will not be made unilaterally in deciding how health services are going to be paid for in this country but, as well, that the amounts that are going to be paid for the health care services that are required are going to be fully paid, that the costs are going to be fully covered by the federal government for forces' personnel here in Alberta.

What we're asking for in this amendment, Mr. Speaker, is a reversal, immediately and fully, of this decision and committing to no future changes. I would ask for the Assembly to support this amendment.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a brief question or comment for the Minister of Health.

Seeing none, is there anyone else that would like to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to speak to this amendment. Obviously, as my colleagues have said and having looked at the amendment that was just presented to us, you know, I will vote in support of this motion. Certainly, we want to make sure that our military families have the support that they need. If anything, of course, we would like it to be even broader than this motion before us today. Our party believes very much in making sure all Albertans are supported and that we don't just make priorities of a select group of people, for example.

Immediately after being elected, the government chose to give a \$4.5 billion handout to corporations, and this is having an impact on the rest of the services. Certainly, as the Minister of Seniors and Housing previously, I met many times with organizations, seniors' centres across this province, who are now very afraid of the cuts.

While we support and I support supports for health services – and the minister herself did just say that if the federal government doesn't reverse this decision, the Alberta government will, you know, backfill on that. We're happy about that. But that shouldn't be the only thing. There is an array of services that are needed, and we have seen, very sadly, that supporting the elite, supporting the big corporations doesn't trickle down. Those theories have been debunked for years and years. It doesn't support all people. We have the greatest inequality in our province in Canada, so many people don't benefit from that, and of course we already know that there haven't been any jobs created from that.

I mean, there are so many things to be done. For example, when we were government, with the MLA for Edmonton-Castle Downs – she was our military liaison, and she worked with my ministry – early on in the mandate I met a veteran who was working with homeless veterans. Sometimes because of the stress of the work, the very, you know, demanding issues that they face – sometimes they have physical injuries, but a lot of times it's more mental health issues – unfortunately, veterans will turn to addictions, and that can lead to a very negative trajectory, ultimately to homelessness.

This veteran was working very hard to support veterans experiencing homelessness. He wanted to meet with me, and I was happy to do that. That was sort of earlier in my mandate in that role. Very quickly, very expeditiously we actually opened a veterans' homeless facility here in Edmonton with next-door wraparound services to support veterans with mental health issues. Our government stepped up very quickly, responded to a concern in the community.

Of course, we know that housing isn't enough. We must make sure that there are those wraparound services. So while we support the government's move to make sure that veterans have the health care they need and that it's, you know, made sure that they get enough funding to cover those costs and it shouldn't be cut back, we know that there is so much more to do in this area and many others. We just want to stand in support of making sure that Alberta is an inclusive province, where all are included and some aren't privileged more than others.

Having said that, I'll thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for a brief question or comment. The Minister of Health has risen.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to say that it is witless, it is shameless, and it's ridiculous. If somebody wants to perpetuate the misinformation to Albertans that there is \$4 billion or \$4.5 billion or whatever the fake number that they want to come up with for what the job-creation tax cut is, talk about it. Talk about it. It is your right to make that misinformation to Albertans, but doing it while we are debating this amendment and this motion regarding health care services for our forces' personnel is ridiculous, and it is shameful, and our friends opposite should cut it out. Let's talk about the amendment; let's talk about this motion. Do that on your own time. This is ridiculous. Let's talk about health care services for our forces' personnel.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a brief question or comment. The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly appreciate the comments and observations and insights that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has brought forward in regard to this motion. I think that it's abundantly clear that our side joined together with the government to call on the federal government to ensure that our Armed Forces are being given proper due in regard to health care

and supports in the broadest possible way. You know, now more than ever is a prescient time to talk about the importance of ensuring that the public health care infrastructure and social service infrastructure are in place for our Canadian members of the Armed Forces here in the province of Alberta.

Health care is the responsibility of each of the provinces and territories in this country, and one thing does not stand in isolation with the other, Mr. Speaker, quite frankly. If the quality and the breadth and the scope of public health care are compromised in any jurisdiction, including this one, then the health care and the quality of social services for Canadian Armed Forces members and, indeed, all residents of this province or other provinces are compromised as well.

10:00

These things do not stand in isolation, quite frankly. You know, as you pull the string along the way, you have to face the responsibility that comes with that. If you are cutting and compromising health care here in this province, then it does follow that you are compromising the integrity of health care to not just Armed Forces personnel but to all residents here in the province of Alberta.

You know, I'm not here to give lessons in logic or governance, by any means, to the members opposite, but it's important to take that full responsibility. As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning and I myself as well pointed out, often Canadian Armed Forces personnel would look to get a position here in the province of Alberta because of the quality of health care and social services that are provided to all citizens of this province as compared to maybe postings in other places in Canada. For us to ensure the integrity of our public health system and to fight and to fend against cuts to the budget of this government is, I think, in keeping with our responsibility as the members of the Official Opposition and indeed our responsibilities to all residents of Alberta, including members of the Canadian Armed Forces.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Hon. members, there is approximately a minute remaining under 29(2)(a) if anyone has a very brief question or comment.

Seeing none, are there others wishing to join the debate? The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise in debate on the motion before the House.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly denounce the federal government's decision to reduce the rates at which it reimburses the costs of providing health care services to Canadian Armed Forces members, call on the federal government to immediately and fully reverse this decision, commit to no future changes, and provide the highest level of treatment for these members, and recognize the contribution of these members, who bravely and willingly risk their lives for our country.

More specifically, of course, I'm speaking to the hon. Minister of Health's amendment, which calls for a full reversal of the decision insofar as, I gather, the federal government has announced a partial reversal. How did that come about, Mr. Speaker? Well, only because their surreptitious, middle-of-the-night, secret effort to cut health care for members of the Canadian Armed Forces was revealed by whistle-blowers in the Canadian Armed Forces and reported by Global television two nights ago.

Mr. Speaker, I stand here not only as Premier but also as a former Minister of National Defence and as the son of a former Royal Canadian Air Force fighter pilot and the descendant of people who have stood in our uniform going back, frankly, to the defence of

British North America before Confederation. I stand here as somebody who is immensely proud of the sacrifices and risks taken by our men and women in uniform. I know that we Albertans have always had an enormous respect and great support for our soldiers, sailors, and aviators, and that has often been expressed by a disproportionately high level of military enrolment by residents of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, given that context I was shocked to hear the news earlier this week about the federal government's secret effort to cut basic health benefits for acute care for members of the military. As the hon. the Minister of Health has underscored, our soldiers, sailors, and aviators do not get to choose where they are deployed. It is a condition of their service that they can be deployed anywhere across Canada or, for that matter, around the world. It is therefore essential that they have the certainty of seamless health care coverage that follows them wherever they may find themselves. Before the Chrétien government effectively shut down and radically reduced the military hospital network in the mid- to late 1990s, there was a system of military hospitals, and most of the clinical services provided to military personnel in Canada were provided at those military hospitals.

However, as a cost-cutting exercise, in order to reduce expenditures, the Canadian Armed Forces, the Department of National Defence, decided about 20-some years ago that it was more efficient to effectively contract out that domestic care for military personnel to provincial health systems, which essentially means that the Department of National Defence enters into service contracts with the 10 provinces through which the federal government is responsible for reimbursing the provinces at their normal rates for the services that are provided.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, just on that point alone, we do know that there sometimes are gaps that our transferred personnel fall between. For example, for a soldier at Gagetown, New Brunswick, who may be on a wait-list for surgery – or perhaps his or her spouse is – when they move to Alberta, they have to get to the back of another queue to access the same service. I know that I and the government's liaison to the Canadian Armed Forces, the Member for Leduc-Beaumont, have been in discussions with both the Armed Forces and the Department of Health to see if we can somehow resolve or mitigate challenges such as that. But, fundamentally, the system has worked reasonably well for the past two decades for servicemen and -women, where they've been able to access provincial health systems.

Now, I gather that the premise of the unannounced, secret cut by the federal government was that the provinces are supposedly charging DND too much for these clinical services. The truth is that their rates are the same as they are for any out-of-province individual or anybody not insured by Alberta medicare. They're the same rates that we would be charging, for example, the Workers' Compensation Board when it buys health services from AHS. They're the same rates that a foreign visitor coming to Alberta that goes into a hospital or clinic would pay or, for that matter, a Saskatchewan resident who has not yet established residency here, and then we would bill that back to Saskatchewan through the interprovincial reciprocal health care billing agreements. Mr. Speaker, the rates are quite fair. They're not set to generate some kind of notional profit for the Alberta Crown. They're set to essentially be cost recovery for Alberta taxpayers.

The effect of the changes that were made by the federal Liberals was effectively to impose those costs on Alberta taxpayers. Now, we estimate that that was a cost of \$2 million, which may not seem like an enormous amount of money in the context of a \$49 billion budget, but across the country it's quite a significant shift of costs from the Department of National Defence to provincial taxpayers.

In the case of Ontario I understand it's \$10 million, so likely about \$25 million to \$30 million nationally.

Mr. Speaker, more deeply than that, this really shows a profound disrespect for the greatest Canadians, those who are prepared to, frankly, give up their lives in the defence of this country, our values and interests. Surely, it is incumbent upon any government of any partisan stripe to prioritize beyond everything the support required by our women and men in uniform. That's why the government has brought forward this motion, because we are so profoundly disappointed in the disrespect implicit in this secret decision by the Trudeau Liberal government.

Mr. Speaker, although I only served briefly as Minister of National Defence, for, I think, 10 or 11 months during a time of fiscal constraint, a time when the federal government was actually, unlike the current one, focused on fiscal probity and balancing the budget, we had to watch every dollar that was spent. And even in that context, let me tell you that nobody in the Department of National Defence or the Canadian Armed Forces approached me as minister to say: we need to cut the rates for health services for military personnel. Had they approached me about that, the conversation would have ended in a New York minute. It would have ended right there and then had they proposed such a thing to me as minister.

I find this, quite frankly, shocking. This was not, when I was minister in 2015, coming up from the system. Even after rigorous spending and program reviews, even after spending had been reduced in certain low-priority areas, nobody had proposed what was just done by the federal government. So I wonder: where did this come from, and why was this done, an act of great insensitivity that also has the collateral effect of downloading costs to the taxpayers of Alberta?

10:10

So, Mr. Speaker, I want to salute the hon. the Minister of Health for assuring our military personnel that regardless of the irresponsibility and cold-heartedness of the federal government on this matter, the government of Alberta can assure all military personnel serving in this province that we have their backs, that if there's any diminution in federal insurance or rates for health benefits, that will not affect their access to clinical services in Alberta through Alberta Health Services.

Mr. Speaker, I will just conclude by thanking members for their interest and support. I think it's regrettable the Official Opposition did not allow this matter to come before the House urgently yesterday. I urge all members to support this motion so that united we may send a message to this federal government, a government that has done so much to inflict such deep damage on this province. This is just yet one other example of, I submit, why we need a new federal government on October 21.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a brief question or comment.

Seeing none, we are on amendment A1. Are there those wishing to speak? I see the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler has risen.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is not focused on making life better for Canadians. He increases our taxes, constrains our industries, and embarrasses us on the world stage. This week he's unilaterally decided that our members of the military no longer deserve proper health care coverage. Under the Canada Health Act and provincial health acts the federal government provides coverage for military members. Provincial hospitals provide services such as surgery, MRIs, and

other acute care to military members, and then the military provides reimbursement to the provinces based on a set-fee model. Justin Trudeau and his Liberal government have decided that across the country these fees were too high, so he has cut them.

Let me say again: the government has decided to tell hospitals and provinces across the country that they are charging too much for health care and have picked the price they're going to pay. This arrogant act shows our Prime Minister truly believes he knows it all. He's abandoned our Canadian Armed Forces members, leaving the expense of their health care to the generosity of hospitals while the provinces take up the slack. That is a cowardly way to avoid this extremely important federal responsibility. These changes were made without consultation and remain without justification, without any respect for the sacrifices that our military members make. They've chosen one of the most challenging and dangerous careers in service to our country, and the thanks they get is being tossed to the margins by Justin Trudeau and his government.

Some hospitals in Ontario have drawn the hard line that they cannot afford it. Alberta hospitals will remain open and accepting of military members, and they certainly will not be turned away because they cannot pay for their treatment themselves. It is extremely disappointing, to say the least.

Just as disappointing, our colleagues in the NDP apparently kind of agree with this motion. We should not be here debating whether or not we will defend our military members from a cut to their health care. The NDP is more dedicated to standing behind Justin Trudeau than they are to standing up for our forces. This is a man that does not take his own actions seriously. He says that he's made it very clear there will be no cuts to services yet provides no justification for where the money will come from. It's as if he thinks our provincial hospitals are getting rich.

Mr. Speaker, every dollar that comes out of these reimbursements must come from somewhere. It is an absolute disgrace that behind closed doors our authoritarian Prime Minister attacks our military members, but as soon as a microphone is in front of him, he does just the opposite. Until our federal government shows some reason and humility and fully reverses this horrible decision, our province will make sure that they are properly covered. I'm happy to support this amendment, and I hope the rest of this House does as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, are there any others wishing to speak to the amendment?

Seeing none, I'm prepared to call the question on the amendment.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Speaker: We are back on the motion, Government Motion 33. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre has risen.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise today and speak to this government motion, resolving that the Legislative Assembly denounce this decision by the federal government to reduce the rates at which it reimburses the costs of providing health care services to the Canadian Armed Forces members, with the new amendment calling for that to be fully reversed and that they commit to no future changes and indeed "provide the highest level of treatment for these members". In particular, I appreciate this opportunity, being my first opportunity to rise during this fall session of the Legislature. I can't think of a better topic to have the opportunity to speak to in the position as the Official Opposition critic for the health care file.

I apologize that I wasn't able to be here a little earlier this morning for this debate. I was reading to students at Oliver school,

and students always have lots of questions. One of theirs for me was: was I born here in Edmonton, and where was my family from? I was pleased to be able to tell them that my father came here from Trinidad in 1967 and that my mother's family came here from the Netherlands in 1948. One of the students immediately remarked and said: hey, your mom's family were in Holland before 1948; that means they went through World War II. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, my grandparents did, and they lost the majority of their possessions. They lost their farm and most of what they had, and that is largely what directly led to them coming to Canada.

So, indeed, I recognize the great role that Canadian soldiers played in the defence, in the freeing of many across Europe during World War II and, in particular, at home, a place where Canadians are still well respected and celebrated because of the brave and heroic work of our military members who served there. I recognize that since that time Canada has continued to have military members that have provided great service around the world in many different regions. Indeed, we owe the greatest of respect and support to those members who have chosen to step up to serve in our military, in the reserves, in whatever capacity and, indeed, the many sacrifices we know that they make in that work, up to and including at times their own lives.

That is why our federal government has largely throughout history been committed to looking after those individuals that do choose to serve, to make sure that we provide all of the appropriate supports and services and things that are needed for them and their families and, indeed, as we have learned more about the impacts of that type of service and work, to begin to improve the services we provide afterwards to help them deal with some of the other issues, thinking in particular about mental health, PTSD, and some of these other areas, where, admittedly, many governments of many political stripes have failed members in the past but have begun to learn, and we have begun to change and evolve.

On this particular issue I am one hundred per cent behind this motion that has been brought forward, calling on the federal government to reverse and commit to never again implementing this decision because of the effects that this could have on our military members. I appreciate the Premier's words in noting the challenges that members already face in moving between our different provincial health care systems, recognizing we have a complexity of services across Canada and ways that we interact as jurisdictions. We need to at all times, as the Premier has noted, on issues like free trade and others, indeed, also in health care, look for ways that we can reduce barriers, not create further ones for Canadians that are moving from province to province and, indeed, recognizing for our military members, as the Premier noted, who do not themselves get to choose where they live but are instead told and ordered to go to a particular place.

It is incredibly important that we maintain from the federal government the appropriate level of funding and do not try to download onto other jurisdictions the costs that are involved of looking after our military members and ensuring that they receive the health care that they deserve and that they earned through their service, for both themselves and their families.

10:20

Now, the Premier was reflecting a bit on how this decision might have come about. I can't say. Obviously, I was not there in that room. I was not part of that department. The Premier himself, having served in the role, has some idea of how these processes work, and indeed having been part of a government that pursued some issues of austerity and looking for ways that money could be saved, he is well familiar, I suppose, with how these sorts of things move through the system and these decisions are made. I appreciate

that in his testimony he was thoughtful and reflective in that role to try to ensure that when cuts were made, they would not be made in such a way that they would affect those who we are most committed to supporting, those being our military members.

But I think it is an important lesson for us to consider, indeed, as we as a province are looking at making some real changes in how we apportion our spending and as we have a government that is strongly committed towards cutting the budget and to saving dollars, that we give due consideration, that we do not take steps like this federal government has done that are going to impact vulnerable populations and people to whom we owe a debt as a government and as a society; all those, in fact, that we want to support and assist.

When we simply make a resolution that cuts must be made without due care and attention, I think this is the sort of result we may get. The Premier used terms like "tone-deaf," and I think that's entirely appropriate. It is tone-deaf, but sometimes I think within the upper echelons of power or perhaps within bureaucracies or other areas where we are considering these issues, we do not always reflect on the effect it may have on the ground. And, indeed, we've seen that previously with federal governments in Canada of all political stripes. We saw it under the government of Prime Minister Harper, when there were changes that were made to kill the lifetime pensions for veterans – again, looking to save money – when there was the closing of at least nine veterans' offices across Canada, which, again, had effects on services for members and was definitely protested by many members of the military, or when we found even some of the jobs that were cut or other things that were affected. Indeed, there was a court case at one point, where the court was required to order the government to pay \$887 million to veterans for dollars that had been clawed back from 4,000 disabled veterans and their families across Canada.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I don't think this is something that's coming from any particular political stripe. I recognize that members have been concerned about partisanship, and since my arrival in the House this morning, I have certainly heard that on both sides of this aisle. But to be clear, Madam Speaker, this is not an issue of a particular government. This is an issue that happens when governments fail to consider how their actions are going to roll out when they are perhaps a bit too driven by a particular purpose or, one might say, ideology. That does concern me as we come into this period now as a province of increasing austerity.

Again, setting aside the reasons for why this government may feel that's the road they need to pursue and certainly the mandate which they have to pursue it, what I would say is that as we stand here today in support of our veterans and as we recognize that we are all united in calling on the federal government to reverse this decision, we think very carefully about the decisions we are about to make as elected members on behalf of our constituents, on behalf of all the people of Alberta, that we are not downloading costs onto other jurisdictions, say, our municipal governments, as we look at making changes to RCMP and police funding, or as we may look at changes to how we fund FCSS or how we may choose to fund other parts, indeed, that the decisions we make on how we fund our health care system do not place anyone in jeopardy in terms of their ability to access care. We all recognize governments are required to provide and should provide for all their members. As we all here this morning do agree, the federal government needs to step up and do appropriately and fund appropriately for our military veterans. I think it's important that we make sure that as we stand and support this motion today, we do not ourselves then turn and forget the lesson that has been so amply demonstrated.

I appreciate that the minister brought this forward. I appreciate that the minister is raising this. I think it's important for us to consider, as indeed we are considering the cost of our health care system here in Alberta. I think it is reasonable that we would stand up and resist an attempt to place further costs on our system, and I would hope that we would be careful in considering that we do not do the same to others.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, I recognize the great debt that we owe to those that serve in our military service and provide that protection. Indeed, I recognize many that serve in many different areas of the government or the public service and provide help and benefit in so many ways, but I recognize that when we look at our veterans, when we look at our military and those who serve there, that is a particular line of service that is worthy of an additional level of respect for their willingness, indeed, to sacrifice, if required, their lives but also to make great sacrifices in their own lives and those of their families as they move to different parts of the country, as they experience chaos and disruption, as they spend that time in service overseas away from their families.

It is incumbent on us to ensure that we hold our government to account, that we provide the best of services, appropriately funded, to ensure that those members will never find themselves wanting, that when they turn for help, it is available for them and their families so that they may continue to do the incredibly important and good work that they do and that others may be inspired to follow in their footsteps.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Any members wishing to speak?

Seeing none, any members wishing to speak to the motion as amended? The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Ms Rosin: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The selfless and brave individuals who compose our Armed Forces deserve more than lip service from the government that is sworn to honour and care for them. They deserve more than platitudes, and as important as saying thank you to our service members may be, they deserve more than that; they deserve a government that will fight for them.

I will remind this House of a critical failure that took place on February 8 of last year, not too far from this very room. A veteran who had been wounded by an improvised explosive device while on deployment in Afghanistan wanted to know why the federal government continues to fight veterans groups in court. You would think that the response he received would honour his service and his sacrifice – after all, he did lose one of his legs because of the attack he suffered while deployed – but instead he was told that the federal government would continue to fight veterans groups in court because, and I quote, they're asking for more than the federal government is able to give right now. The gross disrespect present in a response like that, Madam Speaker, is frankly nothing but shameful.

This pattern of established behaviour is why I'm not surprised to hear that the federal government is letting our veterans and our active service members down once again. I'm not surprised. I'm standing in this House today to support this motion because we need to send a clear message of support to our veterans and our active service members, that this side of the House – and it sounds like the other side of the House as well – refuses to fail them. How are we supposed to attract the best and the brightest to our Armed Forces when the federal government continues to cut cheques for them that are cancelled before they're even cashed? How are we supposed to reassure the spouses, children, and friends of military members that their loved one will be taken care of in the event of a damaging

crisis if the federal government is pulling the rug out from underneath our active service members through their heartless decision-making.

I've heard specifically from spouses and family members about how they've been disregarded in this matter. The spouse of a full-time service member has told me on numerous occasions about the dangers of her husband's job. She says that there's a constant crushing thought in the back of her mind and in the minds of many family members that when her spouse leaves for another exercise or deployment or emergency response assignment, she may never see him again, or if he does come home, he'll need a calibre of physical or mental care that she isn't ready or able to provide on her own.

I can't relate to this. This isn't an experience that is common to me or my relationships with my loved ones. I wake up and I worry about fender-benders, black ice, and tripping up stairs; I don't have to worry about lost limbs, electronic warfare, biochemical weapons, or bullets when my loved ones go off to work.

10:30

As a member of this Assembly I do know what it's like to spend gross amounts of time away from my family; however, I don't know what it's like to go to work one morning expecting to see your husband at the end of the day only to have him be deployed last minute to combat a natural disaster with no notice and be gone for weeks with no indication of when or if he's coming home.

I also don't know what it's like to have to have conversations about what happens when a loved one is deployed or what could happen if they are injured while on deployment or on a training exercise, but what I do know is the way that our federal government has been treating our service members is wrong. It doesn't take a uniform or a family member enlisted to call out indecency or disrespect when you see it.

Madam Speaker, I for one vehemently disagree that veterans are asking for more than their government is able to give; they're just asking for the basics. They're asking to be remembered, respected, and considered. They're asking for the most basic level of human compassion that we can give them as governments. This basic dignity of a government that will take care of them when they've given everything they can to keep our country safe shouldn't be an ask; it should be a baseline attitude we approach policy-making from.

The job that our Armed Forces do is thankless, exhausting, and frequently dangerous. When members of our Armed Forces sign their contracts, they're committing themselves to our country. Their spouses, children, family, and friends come second to their service and commitment to their country, to Canada. Their very selves and those who they love the most come second to their commitment to our nation.

I love this country, but I know that so many of the reasons that make me love it are built on the sacrifices of hundreds and thousands of Canadian Armed Forces members that came before me. Why are we honouring them with a government that can't be bothered to commit to them despite their thankless and selfless commitment to us?

Before I close, I do want to honour one specific Armed Forces member, who I believe deserves an extra special thank you today. This is a wonderful lady named Maryanne McGrath. Maryanne is a second lieutenant and works as a reservist administering the Royal Canadian Air Cadets program to our rural youth. She commits several days a week to work with and empower our next generation. Her service for our country doesn't end there, Madam Speaker. Maryanne also serves the provincial government in her role as my legislative co-ordinator. Maryanne spends every day of her life

tirelessly serving the people of our province and our country with a smile, and I consider myself so honoured to know her and have her in my life.

Madam Speaker, every Armed Forces member I have ever met has no hesitation when it comes to laying themselves on the line for the sake of this country and its people. The very least we can do is ensure this country will do the same for them when they need us.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Any members wishing to speak?

Seeing none, any members wishing to speak to the motion as amended? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise, and I'm going to say that it's my duty, I think, to speak to this motion today as amended. You might find it a little bit odd that I say "duty." It's not just because I represent a northeast Edmonton riding that is home to many of our military families, but mostly it's because of my personal connection and my support for the military.

Both of my parents served in the air force, but, very luckily, not in a theatre of war. I think about that. You know, they were lucky. They were both honourably discharged and were able to go on with their lives. Not only did they serve in the military, Madam Speaker, so did my grandfather. He served in both world wars: one of the major landings during World War I and as a prison guard for prisoners of war in World War II. Unfortunately, I never had the opportunity to formally meet my grandfather. During World War I he was a casualty of the mustard gas poisoning, which gave him significant health challenges going forward, and it was because of those health challenges that, while my mother was pregnant with me, he unfortunately passed away due to some of those things.

So when I look at this motion today, I feel a bit of a personal connection around this and how important it is, and I can't help but think about why it is we're here today bringing this motion forward. I'd like to call it this, Madam Speaker: we're here having to bring this motion because somebody did, what I like to refer to as bottom-line decision-making, where we're looking at the bottom line and we're making decisions based solely on that, and that usually leads to outcomes that are not desirable.

I've heard over and over again around our military families who have served in theatres of war, where the supports for them are not there. Of course, during the debate I've also heard, again, as the Member for Edmonton-City Centre said, some political exchange from both sides. I think we might want to consider the overarching thing about this, and it is that when we ask our women and men to go into harm's way, into a theatre of war, it is because of a political decision that was made by a handful of people just like us in a room just like this. It is a bit of a political spin on this, and we need to remember that.

When we do make those political decisions to send our military personnel into harm's way, we should be more than ready to have their backs when they need it. We're here with this motion because that has failed to happen, and it has failed to happen over a very significant period of time, Madam Speaker. We have not had the backs of our military personnel. I think about: would I have had the chance to meet my grandfather had the government of the day had my grandfather's back in terms of providing proper levels of health care, publicly delivered, no questions, show up and get the treatment you need? But a group of individuals made a political decision, a bottom-line decision to not do that.

I must say that I was certainly encouraged by the Minister of Seniors and Housing, that should the federal government fail to step

up, you're ready to do that. I'm very, very grateful that you're willing to do that, as it should be, just make the decision, not even debate about it. Thank you for doing that. I really appreciate that.

When I think about some of the things that have been offered, again, I'm hoping to influence our ability to get away from bottom-line decision-making. My time in labour has seen many different union contracts being negotiated. One of the things that I've always seen during those times is where a company will say: "Well, we'll give you a lump-sum payment. That will make up for everything." No. It doesn't.

We've seen that kind of disrespect being given to our military families where a lump-sum payment – if you would indulge me here. There was a quote from Pat Stogran, who was the veteran ombudsperson, who was quoted saying: deputy ministers make more on average in one year than a person who lost two legs in Afghanistan can be expected to be paid out for the rest of their lives. We asked somebody to go and suffer that kind of an injury. It is insulting to offer a lump-sum payment. We should be there to provide for their medical needs, no questions asked, whatever it takes. I have to say I've seen some decisions made by this current government around bottom-line decision-making. We're here today because that was made.

10:40

I know that veterans are very strongly opposed to this. My hope is that this motion as amended, brought forward, will hopefully convince whatever federal government, whether it's the current government, whether it was the past government. They both failed to get away from this sort of bottom-line decision-making and provide our veterans with what we need to help ensure that they have a quality of life that is equal or better than the sacrifice we made as a political decision in a room like this.

Some interesting statistics that I've seen and that the OAG report found, that returning soldiers with mental health issues have increased sixfold between 2002 and 2014. One statistic that jumped from the report was a 24 per cent refusal rate for veterans applying for disability benefits. You have got to be kidding me. I've even heard stories – and maybe some of you have from your own military veterans in your ridings – where an individual on a regular ongoing basis has to prove their leg is still missing from when it was blown off in Afghanistan. We need to do better as political decision-makers.

What did that mean? That meant that 3,684 soldiers who believed they needed benefits to deal with things like mental health issues were refused on first application. Madam Speaker, I don't know about you. I've had disturbing dreams just from going to see a horror flick, let alone what our women and men may have seen in a theatre of war. And why we can't provide for their needs when they come back: it shouldn't even be a question.

After appeals, 2,841 veterans have been cast adrift, which means that they are no longer tracked by Veterans Affairs, and nobody knows whether they are endangering themselves or maybe even somebody else. Political decision-making based on bottom lines does not work for our veterans. From a very personal standpoint I very strongly agree with this motion as amended. I am not dithering or half-heartedly supporting as may have been suggested by one member. I would hope that other members will support this, but, more importantly, as we move forward in this 30th Legislature, that we start thinking more than just about the bottom line, because it affects people. It affects their families. When it comes to our veterans, we shouldn't even be having this discussion.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to also thank the Member for Edmonton-Decore for his remarks, particularly outlining his connection, his family connection, to the military. Like him, I too share a family connection to the military. I'd just like to kind of respond to that, saying that I am the grandson of Jack Harker and Paul Schow. Both men served in World War II, something that I am very proud of and I am very passionate to speak about because without these gentlemen, without the service that they provided and gave to this country, we may not have the opportunity to stand in this Chamber today and even have this conversation.

But when I think about the military and when I think about those who serve our country, I often think about my grandparents and what they were asked to do at such a young age. At 18 years old my grandfather, Jack Harker, went off to war to become a bomber pilot. He flew a Halifax bomber in the Second World War. At 18, when I was lacing up basketball shoes, he was lacing up combat boots. When I was putting on a jersey, he was putting on a thick leather insulated coat to fly this bomber on bomber missions. When I was doing team huddles in basketball, he was doing a flight precheck with men who may not return to their families. That's the kind of service that I think about, and I wonder if youth today growing up understand that. While many of them are playing video games, my grandparents were not playing. They were at war.

Sometimes I think the impact and the gravity of the service of our military is lost on some people. I hope that isn't the case, but I find that that might be true. I've even heard some people go as far as saying that people who join the military do it by choice, so it's no different than any other job. That could not be further from the truth. Name me one other job that you go to every day that you may not return home from, with the exception of our first responders. Yes, it is a choice to join the military, but that choice takes significantly more deliberation than, say: do I take this job at this ad agency or this ad agency? What is at stake? For that, for that sacrifice, I'm so grateful to gentlemen like Brock Blaszczyk, who made that decision to go and fight for our country.

The question I've heard asked today is: if we agree on this motion, then why are we even having the discussion? In my opinion, Madam Speaker, the answer is simple: because we won't stand idly by and let the federal government do something as cowardly as cutting funding for our military veterans. It is patently unreasonable that this Prime Minister would have the audacity to pay out \$10.5 million to a convicted terrorist and turn around and tell our military veterans that they're asking too much. It's disgraceful. It's despicable. I'm surprised the Prime Minister had the audacity to say that to Mr. Blaszczyk's face, and then he stands behind it.

Madam Speaker, I don't want to take too long on these remarks, but I needed it to be on the record, to be part of this conversation, that I support this motion wholeheartedly for a number of reasons, for Jack Harker, for Paul Schow, for Brock Blaszczyk, and for every other member of the military who has served and is serving now, to show respect for them and for the things that they do so that we can be here in this Chamber and speak freely on behalf of our constituents.

With that, Madam Speaker, I'll conclude my remarks.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any members wishing to speak to the motion as amended?

Mr. Nielsen: No. Do I get to respond?

The Deputy Speaker: You have 20 seconds. Did you want to speak, hon. member?

Mr. Nielsen: Is there time?

The Deputy Speaker: Yeah.

Mr. Nielsen: Thanks. I want to thank you for your comments, especially the family connection that you share. Interesting perspective, considering, you know, that we both like to play the game of basketball and whatnot, so I definitely connected with that. You know what? I would even take the one comment you said about choosing to serve: it's a calling.

The Deputy Speaker: We'll get you next time.

Any members wishing to speak to the motion as amended? The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Yes. Thank you, Madam Speaker. We've heard some really good debate on this issue. We all have family connections, and I'd like to share a few of mine as well. There is a lineage that goes back, especially with Albertans in this province doing what's right and standing up in their times of need. My great-grandpa Kemp was actually British Expeditionary Force, so he was out of Pincher Creek. He served in both wars. Both of my grandfathers – Grandpa Ophus, Grandpa Getson – served. I have a lot of friends and family that have served.

As one colleague put it, the pipeline industry is the French foreign legion of construction, so with that, we get tons of other folks that come in. We're talking about transferable skill sets. Construction sites: they're wonderful for allowing these folks to utilize their team efforts, their planning skill sets, the ability to motivate, the ability to execute. You'll see that showing up in spades when anyone wants to give those folks a chance.

10:50

I've had, you know, the honour of working with a gentleman by the name of J.F. Trembley, who was the former base commander out of Calgary. He ran all of our camp side of it. A friend of mine, Glen Brooks, is former Australian airborne. A gentleman that volunteered during my campaign, former Sergeant Major Tom Cox, had served well and gone on to be a director at ATCO. My father-in-law, who's a retired physician, was a captain in the Canadian military for the airborne group. Greg McIsaac, another gentleman that came back and had served in taking care of all the logistics in Afghanistan, had worked with us as well. Ben Klick, master sniper and a pathfinder, is a gentleman that I do training with for long range. If we're to be proud of our sniper group, they are the ones with the most confirmed kills in the theatres in our current realm. The training and the commitment that these folks put in are second to none. I've also trained with him and current active-duty snipers in that group, going through some different weapons training in those groups. Bruce Pickford: I'm going to mention his sons, Ferron and Steven. I'm not going to mention them specifically because they're both under deployment right now.

When we're speaking about this and we're talking about cutting health care to these kinds of folks, it sits with me pretty hard on a personal note as it is. I'm glad to hear that it resonates with all members in this Chamber.

Obviously, I'm in support of this motion, but actually I'm appalled that we're even having this conversation in the first place. You know, some people say that Justin Trudeau has done much while in office. Well, I disagree. He's done quite a bit in terms of scandals, damage to our national identity, damage to our energy industry, lots of apologizing, lots of spending, and now we see that he's been doing lots of cuts, too, to health care nonetheless, and not just to health care for anyone, Madam Speaker, but to the servicemen and -women that we've been talking about.

How is it that our federal government can treat our military men and women with such disrespect? The Armed Forces, as we've heard, put their lives on the line all the time, but the Liberal government can't even be bothered to put the funds required to take care of them after they've come back and done their service and sacrificed so much for us. I find the Prime Minister's assertions that the federal Conservatives will make cuts, like, to health care completely ridiculous and hypocritical when he himself has just cut all these health care benefits for our veterans. It's complete nonsense.

I suppose this is another thing he has to do to account for his spending mismanagement over the last four years. I already knew higher taxes were his plan, but honestly I didn't even think he'd stoop this low. I understand that the Prime Minister has lots of money of his own. Obviously, he has this to deal with and to take care of the bills. He has that nicely padded trust fund, that would be more than enough to get him the health care he could ever need. He could probably even go to the States and order a suite and have all the health care he wanted. But many of our service veterans are definitely not as privileged as he is. I think he's due for a reality check, but unfortunately it's not in my power to grant that. That lies with the voters here in a couple of weeks.

For larger provinces like Ontario, the hospitals would be on the hook for at least \$10 million. Here in Alberta we're on the hook for at least \$2 million, and I'm glad to hear that it was said today that we will cover those costs and that these veterans won't be left out in the cold because of what the federal government has done. With that, it's almost a cut to all of us because taxpayers in Alberta are having to pick it up now as well. Again, we will and I know the folks in my constituency will back that as well for the service that these folks do.

Even more disgraceful, Madam Speaker, is that this was done quietly during the election period. Apparently, he doesn't want Canadians to know what he's been up to. And his history shows us that after most if not all of the Prime Minister's scandals come to light, he ends up going on vacation. I've got a suggestion for him. Maybe he should consider taking a permanent vacation from the Prime Minister's office and give us all a break from his circus.

This cut was done without warning or without consultation with the provinces. Some of these service coverages have been cut as much as 96 per cent. In addition, the military says that they will no longer pay for the MRI and the CT scans for our military members. This has led to one hospital in Ontario with little choice but to deny military members MRIs since they have no coverage and they need to maintain revenue to maintain operations. Now, the defence minister writes to the Prime Minister and his aides saying that these fee schedules were in line with what provinces pay for everyone else. I can tell you, Madam Speaker, that the provinces pay under health care plans for the MRI and CT scans. Who's going to cover our military members now? Those scans can cost anywhere from \$700 to \$800 each. Maybe the Prime Minister can take personal responsibility and tap a little bit out of his trust fund to help out. But that isn't going to be doable because it seems like he's only worried about himself.

The department of defence has spent years saying that its people are priority number one. With these cuts, apparently not. Our men and women in uniform will tell you that it is an honour to serve their country. It should be our honour to take care of them when they need it, and I'm not seeing the respect that is necessary for these military members, who have given so much to all of us. I'm asking for proper health care benefits, which is more than the Prime Minister has given our service members in the Armed Forces. Perhaps Canadians should stand up to the Prime Minister and tell

him that that vote that they have is too much to give. These men and women deserve more.

I'm glad to hear that we're all in agreement. I strongly support this motion, and we should send that clear message down east.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. government whip.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'd like to thank the member for his comments. You know, as has already been stated several times in this House, this is a very important issue. It's a very important motion. I would myself, I think, be remiss in not talking about my family's history as long as others have done in this House. I think back to my father-in-law, actually, who was in the air force for 20 years. He was injured. He actually had to be discharged from the military due to a hernia incident that he received. He was, sadly, no longer able to serve. He was deployed to certain areas around the world through the Canadian Forces. He's a very proud veteran – a very proud veteran – who was medically discharged.

It's very concerning for me when I hear him talk, whether it be recently or just over the years, of at least the feeling that many of our veterans have regarding the way their country has treated them. Something that this Prime Minister has done recently just really sticks a knife into the way he feels about many of the – well, certainly, this current government. You know, I will say this. He is a proud Canadian. He will defend this country and its values and principles like no other. I'm proud of the service that he has done. Certainly, a person like him, along with others and the gentleman that was in our gallery, who has served this country and been injured in the line of duty – certainly, my father-in-law wasn't injured in the line of duty, but his injury was a result of his job, that he was doing while in the military.

These are the types of people that need to be taken care of. These are the types of people that have sacrificed so much. You know, we always talk about our first responders, we always talk about our military folks, but the fact is that over the years people have talked a lot but not necessarily followed through with some of the words that have come out of their mouths.

I want to thank that member for the words that he has said. I want to thank everybody in this Chamber for the kind words that have been said. I think that we all need to really focus on the servicemen and -women who literally put their lives on the line each day – again, I think it was previously mentioned by one of my colleagues – which allows us to have this voice in this Chamber to represent the constituents whom we have been very honoured to represent. I want to, you know, take this moment to stand here and say, sir, that I will be supporting this motion wholeheartedly, and I want to personally thank all the men and women who have served this country, who have done what a lot of people – we'll just say this. It's a choice that they have made, a sacrifice that they have made, and I thank them wholeheartedly.

You know, I could go on and on about other members of my family as well, but my father-in-law, who certainly is currently alive and does have a medical condition as a result of his job while working in the military: it's people like him that we really need to think about and make sure that they have the proper access to medical care and that we're treating them with the respect and dignity that these people certainly deserve. Thank you, Member, for your comments.

I yield the floor. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

11:00

The Deputy Speaker: There's about 18 seconds under 29(2)(a).

Seeing no one, any speakers to the motion as amended? The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I proudly rise today to acknowledge the brave Canadians who stand up and risk their lives every single day to keep our country and our province strong and free. I am actually saddened to the core with the disrespect that the current federal government has for the members of our Armed Forces. It's sad to see that kind of an approach to those that serve and those that protect us.

It's not only about looking after our own in the time of need. It's the injured and those that have sacrificed not only themselves but their entire families both physically and mentally and not just in the past but in the future as their families will suffer the impacts of PTSD and other things such as physical injuries, mental health issues, and those unfortunate circumstances and pressures that face members of our Armed Forces. The Liberal government has a unique way of saying thank you – don't they? – to those who risk their lives for our country each and every day.

Madam Speaker, I often say to people at the doors – and you sometimes knock on the doors and somebody says: well, I'm not really into politics. It might be a little bit aggressive of me, but I remind those same people that say they're not really into politics that we had generations before us that fought for our democracy, fought for our freedom and did it selflessly. They were not really into war. They stood up for this country. They did the right thing. They did their duty to this country. We have now a generation of Canadians who take that same sacrifice, that same sense of honour and respect and duty and serve this country so that we can enjoy the democracy and the freedom that we have in this Legislature, in this province, in this country, which, we have to remind ourselves, are unique in the world and something that should be honoured and respected. It is a sacrifice for us, to maintain that in this great country.

Madam Speaker, that unique way that the federal government has actually thanked those hard workers and those dedicated people is to really kick the Armed Forces when they're down. Kicking them when they're down and injured and suffering, again, those physical and mental injuries that they may have, is a disgrace. For the leader of the federal government, the Prime Minister, to say that our Armed Forces are asking for more than the federal government can afford is beyond a disgrace. We've heard that, and that's been reported widely across this country in the past.

This is just another severe attack on those that have served. For the Liberal government to reduce the rates at which it reimburses the cost of providing health care services is completely unacceptable and should be completely unacceptable to all members of this Legislature. I loudly and proudly endorse our government's motion to denounce this decision by the federal government. It is morally wrong, and this motion should be supported by all in this Legislature.

Quite frankly, it's a disgrace to conduct this type of policy decision on behalf of an entire country on the global stage. It's a disgrace for us to have people outside of Canada, let alone inside Canada, see that this is how we treat our Armed Forces. It really shows that that government is not prepared to take care of our own on that global stage. It speaks to the respect that we try and generate for this country. We have from generations not only incredible sacrifice but incredible performance made in two world wars and after that across the world and around this globe, not only in defending that freedom and democracy but also in ensuring peace.

I want it to be heard loud and clear that this United Conservative caucus, our government, and certainly my peers in the Legislature strongly support our Armed Forces. We need to send that signal from this House that we are not only here to work with them but that we are here to defend them in their times of need. We will be their voice and will stand up to this federal government on this decision. We will make that message clear and unequivocal as we deliver it from this House, from Albertans, to this federal government.

Madam Speaker, to me, we need to embrace this. We need to talk about this issue, not conflate it with other issues, as we've heard from the other side of the House here, not conflate it and use it as an opportunity for partisan rhetoric. We need to take this as an opportunity to speak loudly, proudly, and with strong words and strong actions on this irresponsible approach by the federal government.

Madam Speaker, time and time again Justin Trudeau and his Liberal government have wronged hard-working Canadians, and on many occasions, frankly, I've been embarrassed by the loss of reputation that this country has faced over the past four years, fancy wardrobes aside. To the best of my memory, the current federal government gave 10 and a half million dollars on behalf of that government to a known convicted terrorist, and now we see brilliancy, of course, in deciding to take away funding from Canada's very own who are defending this country from that terrorism. That is shameful.

Under the Canada Health Act and provincial health acts across this country, military members are ineligible for various forms of public health care coverage, and that is why the federal compensation is so important to these members, Madam Speaker, so that we can continue in this province to honour and respect and deliver the health care that they so richly deserve.

Time and time again Justin Trudeau has made questionable decisions. The federal government is constitutionally responsible for providing medical care to the members of our military and those retired members of our military, and our Prime Minister has continued to prove that he is dismissive and unbound by the Constitution and has no moral authority when making such decisions that affect so many respected and honoured citizens of our country, denying military members the health care that they deserve and they need not just to survive but to thrive in our communities. I never thought that a federal leader could disrespect those front-line defenders of our democracy and our great country in the way that he has done to date.

Alberta is committed to being here for our Armed Forces. We heard that from our Minister of Health, and I'm proud to stand with him in those commitments. Regardless of what the outcome is of this reckless decision from the federal government, we will stand strong and free in Alberta in providing Alberta's military members with the health care that they have earned and which they so richly deserve. We shall stand strong and united against Justin Trudeau – I hope that we can do this in this House unanimously – and his misguided policies and stand up for our Armed Forces as they stand up for us.

Again, as the Minister of Health stated just yesterday on the front steps of this very Legislature: the Alberta government will not withhold services from military personnel, end quote. He also stated that the reality is that this is a unilateral cut in health care funding from Trudeau's government to the provinces, but, most of all, it's disrespectful towards the forces. End of quote.

Madam Speaker, again, those words that I've shared on many doorsteps have awakened some people to their responsibility, not just their right but, I think, their responsibility, to honour the democracy which has been hard fought for and hard earned and

hard won in this country by generation after generation after generation. Many members of this House know people that have served, have family members that have served, and I would guess that we would find a list of those that have been lost just by talking to the 87 members of this Chamber. It touches all of our lives every time we hear of a loss. We go to Remembrance Day, we see the cenotaphs, and we see the names.

11:10

At my high school, Western Canada high school – and we didn't do this when I was there – what they have done is paired students with members of the Armed Forces that were lost. They have a project there; it's called the wall of fame. What they do is that they pair a student with someone who was lost, and it could be from World War I or World War II. They track down family members, and they get photos. They are responsible for telling the story of that individual, that former student of Western Canada high school who did not come back from the war. In doing so, they honour them, those young people, the youth 18 and over, some of them younger than that, who went and fought for the freedom that we so richly enjoy in this province, that we enjoy in this House, that everyone who has the opportunity to vote, to get involved with the politics that we know about, has an opportunity to honour by doing so. Again, I challenge those people: when you say that you're not into politics, think about those that fought for us that were not really into war.

Madam Speaker, I will be supporting this motion wholeheartedly and with great passion, and I encourage everyone in this House to follow suit. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Any members wishing to speak?

Seeing none, any members wishing to speak to the motion as amended? The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As you know, the Thanksgiving season approaches, and amidst all the conversation happening in light of the upcoming federal election, I'm reminded of how lucky I am, how lucky we all are to be Canadian, to live in a country that is free from war and political violence, a country where we can worship as we want, where we can engage in the free exchange of ideas and voice our opinions freely, like we do here in this Assembly.

We can do all of these things, Madam Speaker, because those rights and freedoms have been fought for and continue to be defended by the brave men and women in the Canadian Armed Forces. These courageous heroes made tremendous sacrifices so that you and I could enjoy these freedoms. If you walk out into the rotunda in the Legislature, you'll see on the wall the names of Albertans who fought in World Wars I and II, and that's because we recognize that our democracy is able to exist today because of the sacrifices that our men and women in uniform have made and continue to make to protect our freedoms. We are eternally indebted to them as Canadians. That's why, Madam Speaker, my colleagues and I were shocked and, quite frankly, sickened to see on Tuesday that the federal government under Justin Trudeau's watch had made major changes to how it plans our veterans' health care.

Madam Speaker, the Canada Health Act as well as the provincial Health Act state that members of the Armed Forces are ineligible for health coverage under provincial plans. Instead, these expenses are supposed to be paid for by the federal government. However, the federal government has dramatically scaled back the amount that it is spending on veterans' health care.

The press secretary to the Minister of Health stated that the ministry received new rates for payment by the Department of

National Defence for hospital services provided to eligible Canadian Armed Forces members. What the federal government is saying, what Justin Trudeau is saying, is that our veterans are not a priority for him, that their health is not a priority for him. Imagine, Madam Speaker, being one of the 40,000 CAF members to have served in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2014 or one of the more than 4,000 CAF members who served overseas during the Gulf war or one of the dozens of combat, training, or peacekeeping missions Canadian Armed Forces have engaged in over the years. Imagine being one of the roughly 61,000 living veterans who served in World War II. Imagine having sacrificed so much, having been willing to die for your country only for your government to turn its back on you. It would be an utter slap in the face.

Madam Speaker, as of 2018 there are an estimated 649,300 veterans in Canada: 48,300 war service veterans and 601,000 Canadian Armed Forces veterans. Covering the health care costs of these veterans is not a big ask when compared to what these veterans have done for Canada. When one has served our Armed Forces, it can be expected that they might need extra care when it comes to their health and well-being. There may be physical ailments that can be expected due to the physically demanding nature of being a member of the CAF. There may be an added need for mental health supports given the high prevalence of depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, and other mental health concerns among veterans, particularly those who have served in conflict zones. In fact, in 2018 it was reported that over 6,700 military members who served in Afghanistan received benefits for mental health conditions, with PTSD being the top mental health concern.

The federal government should also be there to support our veterans as they age and potentially require additional care. Our veterans deserve to have the support that they need to enjoy a high quality of life. Our veterans never abandoned Canada, even in the most trying times, so why in the world does Justin Trudeau think it's okay to abandon them? Madam Speaker, for Justin Trudeau and his government to cut funding in this way is appalling.

The Deputy Speaker: Any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, any members wishing to speak on the motion as amended? The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Mr. Rowsell: Thank you for giving me an opportunity to stand in front of the House today, Madam Speaker. I'm appalled and disappointed by the actions the federal government has taken against our veterans. They are heroes of this country and deserve to be treated that way, not tossed to the side and left on the street. The steps that the Trudeau government has taken in regard to this matter are appalling and hypocritical. Praising their heroism and bravery while simultaneously stabbing them in the back is beyond disgusting. They deserve a government that will fight for them and recognize their incredible contributions to our country, a government that has their backs like they have had ours, a government that will not leave them alone or any one of them behind, just as they would while on the front lines.

Under the Canada Health Act members of the military are not covered by provincial public health plans but are instead covered by the federal government. The government is constitutionally responsible for providing care to all members. Service members that need medical care go through a similar process as out-of-province patients. The military will reimburse the hospital for all services provided. However, these fees can be as much as three times more than the rates that are allowed to be charged by most

provincial plans. When put in tandem with the massive cuts to funding, this puts hospitals on the hook for millions of dollars.

In layman's terms, these changes essentially mean that the military will be covering less of the fees physicians charge, leaving the hospital to cover the rest. These changes set a dangerous precedent for our veterans and will change the way hospitals view them. For example, Pembroke regional hospital projects a shortfall of \$3.4 million, and Kingston health services centre estimates a loss of \$2.3 million, all due to funding cuts. At least one hospital completely stopped accepting military patients for selected services. The hit for Ontario alone is estimated to be at \$10 million. These drastic cuts were done without consultation of our province and will cost Alberta about \$2 million in lost revenue to Alberta Health Services as well as income loss for physicians in our province.

Just because the federal Liberals choose to disrespect our veterans does not mean our party will do the same. Our UCP government has stated that we will not withhold services from any military personnel and that these changes are essentially just a unilateral cut in health care funding to the provinces and are disrespectful to the forces. The department of defence is just as two-faced as Trudeau himself. For years they have gone about flaunting and touting how their people are its priority while playing Judas. Apparently, the Liberal government has the money to give convicted terrorist Omar Khadr a \$10 million payout but doesn't have the money to compensate our brave men and women who fought to serve and protect our country.

We need to stand together as a province and as elected officials and denounce the atrocious, despicable actions of our federal government. An immediate reversal of this policy should be implemented. Our service members deserve the utmost respect, and the least the federal government can do is recognize their contribution to our country and give them the treatment they deserve.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

11:20

The Deputy Speaker: Any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, any other members wishing to speak to the motion as amended? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. You know, it's with a certain degree of sadness and anger that I rise in the Chamber today to discuss the issue of the Trudeau Liberals cutting health care for our military veterans. As you know, a big component of my constituency is 4 Wing Cold Lake, which is home to one of the largest military bases in Canada. Frankly, I find it very disappointing, and the federal Liberals ought to be ashamed of themselves. Cutting our veterans' health care funding while Trudeau and his elite allies posture about caring for all Canadians is beyond the pale.

Under the Canada Health Act members of our Armed Forces are not normally able to access public health coverage under provincial plans. What happens instead is that the federal government is constitutionally responsible for providing comparable medical care to all members of the Armed Forces. Then the military reimburses the hospitals the cost of providing those services.

The Trudeau government has cut the amount the military can pay out to hospitals under this system, therefore rendering hospitals on the hook for caring for military members and waiting for the payout. The end result of this is large portions of Armed Forces members without health care as the hospitals are unable to pay for care, and

the Canada Health Act prevents them from getting care as a civilian would.

Madam Speaker, our veterans and currently active military servicemen and -women deserve so much more than this, and so do their families. You know, I hear stories from folks about the stress that is put on kids when mom or dad are deployed overseas, with always that fear of them not coming home. We also have to think about the families of those servicepeople. These brave men and women fight for our lives and our freedom by sacrificing their lives willingly and often without a second thought. That's because they love our country, and they want to see it protected. They want to see it flourish for them, us, and their families. What do these Armed Forces members get for their service and sacrifice? They get a slap in the face once again from the Prime Minister as he blows off our veterans and active military personnel.

We have to recognize Mr. Brock Blaszczyk, a war veteran who was in the Chamber here earlier this morning, who lost his leg in an explosion in Afghanistan as part of his duty. Mr. Trudeau in a town hall meeting in 2018 was asked by Brock why the government was not providing funding to help veterans. Brock said: I was prepared to be killed in action; what I wasn't prepared for, Mr. Prime Minister, was Canada turning its back on me when I got home. Trudeau's response to this was: the veterans are asking for more than we're willing to give. Amazing. The Prime Minister said that our Armed Forces veterans were asking too much but was all too willing to give convicted terrorist Omar Khadr, a convicted terrorist, \$10.5 million.

Is it any surprise, then, that this government is once again sloughing off our military members? Not really, unfortunately. Trudeau and his Liberals have led a legacy of cutting funding and support to veterans and Armed Forces groups. This is simply another logical step along that path, Madam Speaker.

I know how important our military is. As I mentioned, 4 Wing Cold Lake is one of the 14 wings of the Canadian Armed Forces and is a very big component of the Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul constituency. According to the Royal Canadian Air Force, Cold Lake is the busiest fighter base in Canada. It hosts a multitude of training programs such as being home for the Canadian fighter pilot training, but 4 Wing Cold Lake also attracts top gun crews from all over the world for the annual aerial combat Exercise Maple Flag. We also welcome pilots from all over the world to come and train because we have some of the most accessible airspace in the world for new pilots to get that training that they would never be able to get in their home countries.

In addition to this, Cold Lake has one of the largest aerial weapons test facilities in all of Canada. These air force members have been nothing but a boon since 1954 to the community of Cold Lake, and to think that any of them may not be able to access health care is completely unacceptable, in my eyes. I think I speak for everyone on my side of the House when I say that it is a despicable act and that our veterans deserve the highest level of care available to them. We must not compromise on the quality of service we provide to our military members and veterans because they do not compromise on their willingness to serve and sacrifice for us.

Once again, Madam Speaker, I want to unequivocally denounce these health spending cuts imposed by Justin Trudeau and the Liberals and urge the federal government to reverse these changes immediately. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any members wishing to speak under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, any members wishing to speak to the motion as amended? The hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat.

Ms Glasgo: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I've already spoken under 29(2)(a) on this, but I just wanted to get my name on the record and everything else supporting this motion, put forward by the Minister of Health, as amended. I think it's important that our government takes action on this, standing up to the federal government and really coming together in this Legislature to support our veterans.

Our veterans: we know that they've given it all. They continue to give it all. They make sacrifices. My great-grandfather was one of those veterans. He passed away a few years ago. He was more affectionately known as Bops. He fought in World War II. He was a gunner on the back of an airplane, and he had hearing loss, obviously, from that war. He fought against one of the most brutal regimes the world has ever known. He had integrity and grit, and he was a fantastic human being, and I'm very proud to be from the same family as Orville Studer.

When we're talking about this issue, this is not about him asking for more than he could give. He gave everything. He gave his hearing. His wife gave her husband and his ability to hear her properly. They were married, and then he was off to war. I think that when we're talking about this, context is so important. So, for me, this issue is personal.

Also, in my riding this issue is very important. On I believe it was Sunday I spent some time with the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat out in Redcliff, and we were meeting with veterans at the Redcliff Legion. This is a yearly event where we celebrate some years of service from these veterans. One of the veterans came up to me. His name was Wayne, and Wayne told me about his story and how he's recovering from posttraumatic stress disorder related to his time in the service. He told me story after story about just how important it is to have proper health care and to have these supports because the supports have lent him the ability to sleep at night. The supports have made it easier for him to continue doing what he does and to support his family. I'm happy to be able to speak on his behalf because I think that, for Wayne, this issue is extremely important.

In addition, Brooks-Medicine Hat has the Canadian Forces base in Suffield, Alberta. The Premier, myself, and the Member for Leduc-Beaumont went out to Suffield along with the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, and we toured the base, as it's known in southern Alberta. These people are innovators. They are strategists. They are excellent, and they give it all every day, too. Some of these soldiers and their families have uprooted and moved to little Medicine Hat and Suffield and Ralston to be able to train there. You know, they give so much, and I think the Member for Edmonton-Manning discussed this as well. These people are moving all over the place to take care of our country in the ultimate act of patriotism and laying their lives and their families' lives on the line every day to make sure that our freedoms are taken care of.

At the end of the day, us providing for them and making sure that they have proper access to health care and health care services is the absolute – I believe it's incumbent upon us as government to stand up for these people because they've given so much. These people are not asking for more than they can give. Like I've said before, this is not a political issue. This is an issue that we should be taking to heart and seeing that this is integral to our functioning as government, to be able to advocate for these people, because at the end of the day I don't know who deserves it more. I am happy and proud to be able to stand here as the great-granddaughter of a veteran and the MLA for some of the greatest people that I've ever met, the veterans in Brooks-Medicine Hat.

I proudly support this motion, and I would encourage all members to do the same. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any members wishing to speak under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Any members wishing to speak to the motion as amended? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

11:30

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I, too, will be supporting the motion before us. I think the latest actions by the federal government are just the last in a long line of federal initiatives by governments of all stripes to act in an egregious way towards our Armed Forces' men, women, and others who have given of themselves to protect our country.

I was reminded, by listening to many of the people around the table, of a speech I gave in this House a while ago with regard to the importance of veterans and supporting them. My father served in the Second World War, and he only really found out about his various benefits very, very, very late in life and took advantage of some of the health-related ones. But I can remember that there was never any talk around our table about what the government of the day – he, of course, returned home in '46 – would do for veterans. He was not privy to that information, and he just went on and married, raised his family, and then only late in life understood that there were some benefits that he could get, and he took advantage of those, as I said. I think that a better job, obviously, could have been done for him, for many, many, many veterans over the years, starting after the First World War and onward, but the governments of the day did not take that solemn responsibility to protect and support their people who had served for them, served for Canada as best they could.

I appreciate that the government of Alberta is stepping up and has the backs of veterans in this province who need that support. I think that's the right thing to do. It makes me proud that we're taking that action, and it makes me proud that there is no disagreement around this table around the need to do that. We are standing as one for our veterans with regard to this Motion 33 as amended, and that's a good day for Alberta.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, any other members wishing to speak to the motion as amended? The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The recent announcement by the federal Liberal government came as a shock to me, like I think it did for most Canadians. It's completely against the Liberal campaign strategy of trying to buy votes. They have pledged to spend billions of dollars before the campaign and billions of dollars during the campaign, and they claim to be the only party that is standing up to support middle-class Canadians, yet they are slashing funding for the members of the Canadian Armed Forces and veterans. Our members and veterans are middle-class Canadians like so many others, and they do not deserve to be treated with such disregard.

I am pleased to see that after all the public outrage the government is willing to consult with the provinces, but how can Justin Trudeau justify these cuts? These men and women selflessly serve our country to keep us safe. They leave their families for months to protect our freedom and the freedom of others around the world. It is astonishing that the federal government has chosen to slash health care funding for members and veterans in the name of trimming the budget while wasting money on photo ops and other opportunities that they have to save money as well.

Justin Trudeau really does believe that our veterans are, and I quote: asking for more than we can give. End quote. This complete

and utter disdain for our troops cannot be tolerated. We must not stand by while this Prime Minister slashes the benefits of our troops. We must not stand by as the Prime Minister actively disgraces Canada time and time again. As a member of the UCP caucus I stand here proudly to say that we support our troops, we support their access to timely and effective health care, and we will work hard to ensure that they continue to get the service that they deserve. Our troops give their lives for us, so for the Prime Minister to say that their health care is too expensive is appalling to me.

Our government has pledged to make sure that our members and veterans will receive the health care that they need regardless of the \$2 million that the Liberals are cutting, \$2 million that was being invested in providing members and veterans with front-line services. But what could the Prime Minister possibly be spending this money on? What else is the federal government doing with this money that would have been better than providing a service of health care to our front-line troops? The bottom line is that the funding of health care for the military members is clearly under the jurisdiction of the federal government and the Canada Health Act. This Prime Minister is attempting to pass his responsibilities on to provinces while also reaching into the jurisdictions that suit him. The level of disrespect for our forces is truly troubling. Our members and veterans deserve the highest standard of care, and they face numerous challenges already.

In my own experiences, Madam Speaker, in travelling across the province as the military liaison, I've had the honour to be able to go to military bases across the province, military family resource centres as well, and really hear from the front-line members the incredible work that they're doing. It's really an honour for me when they actually give me a tour of their base because I'm just an MLA from Leduc-Beaumont, and I really look up to these members and what they're doing. If they put me on a tour, it makes me feel like they're putting me on a pedestal, which they should not. I'm honoured to be able to see what they do, and I'm always in awe of what their capabilities are. To all of them: thank you for your service.

To hear from our Health minister and from the Premier that the support will continue is extremely important. We have a number of troops in Alberta who are deploying overseas or are waiting to deploy. That's enough stress on their families already and on themselves, and to add in that they're going to trim back their health care is – I just don't understand why they would think that this is the place to save money, the health care of our veterans.

My own grandfather served in the Royal Canadian Air Force. He joined in 1943 as a gunner. He did numerous sorties and bombing

runs, finishing his career as a military police officer in 1965, in fact, finishing in Cold Lake. I've always been proud of his service and loved hearing about the stories and seeing his medals when I was a kid. He was always somebody that I looked up to. Although I got to know Richard Brewer, honestly, through stories from my family – he died young. He sacrificed so much, and so did my grandmother. Some of the injuries he sustained may have caused, later on, his untimely death, and I really wish that I'd got to know him more personally rather than just through the stories that I was told. I'm proud to be able to stand in the Legislature today to defend the health care that our veterans deserve and that our serving members deserve because he would have wanted me to be able to do that for him. I'm proud to be able to do that on his behalf as his grandson.

For all the serving members across the province, again, thank you for your service; the provincial government has your back. We'll do everything we can on the provincial side within our jurisdiction to make sure that they and their families are supported.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, any more speakers on the motion as amended? The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just want to say thank you for that moving speech.

Also, I move that we adjourn debate until 1:30 this afternoon. Oh, sorry. Do I move to close debate first? I'll gladly do it.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. minister, if you are to speak again, you will be closing debate on this motion.

Mr. Schweitzer: Oh. I see.

The Deputy Speaker: Is there anyone else that would like to speak to the motion as amended?

The hon. government whip.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much. You know, there's been a lot of progress here, and I know that this is something both sides of the House can agree on, that we support this motion. I know that everybody would like to be a part of this vote after question period, so I would like to move that we adjourn the House and return at 1:30.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:40 a.m.]

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