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The 30th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday evening, November 5, 2019

Day 39

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature

First Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 5, 2019

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 21 Ensuring Fiscal Sustainability Act, 2019

[Adjourned debate November 4: Ms Notley]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any hon. members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this evening to respond to Bill 21, the Ensuring Fiscal Sustainability Act, 2019, which is implementing much of the terrible budget that the UCP government has brought forward. Now, Bill 21, like the other bill, Bill 20, that was introduced on the same day, is an omnibus piece of legislation. What that means is that it touches a variety of different pieces of legislation that exist in different ministries, so in my remarks, brief as they will be at second reading, I'm going to be touching on many of the different aspects of Bill 21.

Let me begin just by stating that I will not be supporting Bill 21, Mr. Speaker, because there are a number of very, very hurtful to Albertans measures within Bill 21.

I'd like to just start by speaking to the various pieces within this bill. I'll start by talking about the changes that impact advanced education, our postsecondary sector. Bill 21 is going to lift the cap on tuition for three academic years and set an alternative cap in regulation. Now, we already know, Mr. Speaker, because the government has told us, that the new cap will be 7 per cent for each institution but up to 10 per cent for individual programs. That means that students in our province who have benefited from a cap on tuition, who've benefited from moving from one of the most expensive places to go to university to now something more close to the national Canadian average, can expect to see their tuition rise by 7 per cent a year for the next three years, 21 per cent. Or if you have registered in a particularly expensive-to-deliver program, perhaps you may see tuition increases as much as 30 per cent, essentially making the cost of postsecondary education more expensive for students in Alberta.

There are so many different problems with this, Mr. Speaker, but I'll highlight one that strikes me. Having the cost of tuition dramatically increase here in the province might mean our Alberta children choosing to go to school in other provinces where it is more affordable for them. The problem with that, as we know, is that a very high percentage of students who go away for university will often stay away. I'm concerned that we are making tuition here in Alberta less affordable, that we are making life less affordable for those students.

Now, also contained in Bill 21 is the increase to the interest rate on student loans by 1 per cent, again costing students significant money, adding up over the term of a student loan. We all know how difficult – well, perhaps we don't all know. Many of us know how difficult carrying student loans can be when you're just starting out in your career. Making sure that you have that debt paid off is often a top priority for new graduates, and what this change does is

change the Student Financial Assistance Act and make life more expensive for students.

The government's priority on lifting the cap on tuition and increasing the interest rates on student loans are two changes in Bill 21 that I completely disagree with. I don't think that this is what students asked for, despite what the minister responsible, standing in this House, had to say, and I know that there are university students at universities across this province who are concerned and are talking about organizing protests to try to communicate to this government how hurtful this change in policy can be.

At the same time, this government has cancelled the STEP program, which was often used by young people to find employment in the summer months.

The next section that this Bill 21 impacts is Community and Social Services, in pausing the indexation for people who rely on the assured income for the severely handicapped benefit. As well, Bill 21 moves the eligibility rules to regulation, making it easier for the government in the future, through regulation changes, to change who is eligible for AISH. Both of these changes are incredibly concerning because, of course, what this does is make life harder and more expensive for our most vulnerable, people who rely on the very modest amount of roughly \$1,600 per month – that is the amount I've heard discussed in this House – and who will now no longer be receiving the indexation.

What is indexation, Mr. Speaker? This is so that as the cost of living goes up in our province – we know it does each and every year – it offsets that cost of living by providing just a little bit more to the people who rely on AISH. I understand that to be roughly \$30 per month. When you are somebody who is living on an extremely fixed income, that is a critical amount of money. Thirty dollars per month can make a huge difference to someone who is living on very, very little. I feel like this government has not understood the argument as to why we should not be pausing the indexing of AISH, why it is important for those who are living with the very least to not essentially have the government balance the budget on their backs. Thirty dollars per month can make the difference between someone being able to get more bus tickets, possibly even go see a movie. Someone who is living on AISH deserves to have that normal life, to be able to afford to maintain a reasonable standard of living, and pausing the indexation completely removes that.

Pausing the indexation: there is also in this legislation no indication as to when the pause will be lifted. I can tell you, having seen it happen when, for example, we froze the price of tuition, that it makes a big impact very quickly. It's \$30 a month next year, but that becomes \$60 a month in two years, \$90 a month the third year. It starts to really add up, and it starts to put a lot of pressure on someone living on a very small fixed income. I do not think that we should be targeting our most vulnerable Albertans, those living on a fixed income, when looking at balancing the budget, especially given the fact that this government's budget still has \$2 billion of higher deficit spending than the one planned by our government, especially when we are still ending up at \$93 billion of debt at the end of this government's term.

I do not agree with the choice to pause indexation here as well as on employment and income support benefits. Again we're talking about vulnerable Albertans, Albertans who are very much down on their luck. As we all know as MLAs, we have many people who come to our constituency offices in desperate situations, needing help. I'm so grateful that we have Service Alberta and the income supports that we do here in the province, and I see Bill 21 as weakening that.

The energy change included within Bill 21 has to do with removing the regulated rate option cap, tied in with a bunch of other changes with the electricity system. I certainly know that with the

move to an energy-only market, with the likelihood of power spikes and price spikes impacting Alberta families, having that regulated rate option cap removed is something Albertans are going to notice.

Now, within Bill 21 there are a number of changes to Health. It includes giving the Minister of Health the authority to place conditions on obtaining a practitioner identification number, a specific piece of policy that I understand two other provinces have very recently moved away from because it doesn't work. The interesting thing to me about this piece of policy is that essentially the government is trying to use a stick to tell doctors where they need to go and practise. By taking ownership, by giving the minister that responsibility of being able to say where somebody can practise, he also has essentially the liability or the responsibility when there is a town that doesn't have a doctor. His phone is going to be ringing off the hook now because he's directly responsible for whether a doctor might set up shop and practise in a rural area, not to mention the constitutional issues with telling someone where they have to live.

7:40

I suspect that this piece of poorly-thought-out policy, that other provinces are moving away from, will be a thorn in this government's side should Bill 21 be passed. But I hold out hope, Mr. Speaker, that the reasoned arguments that the opposition is making will break through to the government members, and perhaps some amendments which we will be proposing in Committee of the Whole will be accepted. Hope springs eternal: that is my motto for tonight.

In the Health file it also includes provisions for changes to the doctors' master agreement with the Alberta Medical Association. Essentially, I see this as a further indication of how this government treats partnerships, relationships, bargaining, and that is with a complete lack of respect. Essentially, the government is trying to tilt the bargaining table in their own favour, giving themselves an emergency pull bar, where they can just cancel the agreements that currently exist. That's a bargaining chip. When they are sitting down to talk to doctors, they now have a card that they can more easily play in this game of negotiating, that should be based on respect. We've talked a lot about bargaining in good faith when it comes to the labour relations world. But, really, treating people as adults, going into any negotiations with respect, looking for those opportunities where there is win-win-win: this is all very important. Instead, what the government is doing is giving itself the ability to instead pressure and add bargaining pressure onto the AMA.

I see that as being very similar to the Labour and Immigration change where they are reversing the replacement worker ban in the public sector, essentially tilting the playing field in favour of employers. I strongly disagree with the reversing of the replacement worker ban in the public sector, Mr. Speaker, for a number of reasons. We know that replacement workers tend to escalate situations.

We also know that an essential services agreement is required in so many of our critical workplaces. Now what's going to happen is that the two parties are going to sit down and say, "In the event of a strike at this hospital, how do we make sure that those things that are essential, that are critical to patient care, that are critical to running the facility – to make sure that none of the equipment is damaged in a strike or lockout, let's work out how that is." On this particular ward, perhaps there are normally 10 nurses that are working. In the event of a strike or lockout, there will be two. Well, now those two nurses are going to come to work and replacement workers will also be there, people not familiar with the area, people who need to be trained, potentially, and it's going to escalate the tensions.

It's not going to help lead people to resolve in a respectful labour relations world, the way collective bargaining is designed to do. Think of essential services as a bargain between the two parties, entered into as adults, with respect. Now one side can bargain essential services and then throw that out the window and bring in replacement workers. It does not make sense to me, Mr. Speaker, and I have not heard a good case for why this replacement worker ban is included in Bill 21.

On the Justice and Solicitor General side, Bill 21 creates regulation-making authority and outlines the responsibility of specified municipalities to pay a cost for policing if required by regulation, something that I imagine has many municipalities concerned given the conversations we've been having with policing and the lack of respect that we've seen between partners in something that we should all be able to talk about and work on collectively, because it's all to our benefit. But we're not seeing that out of this government.

Under the Seniors and Housing piece, pausing the indexation of the seniors' lodge program and pausing the indexation of the Alberta seniors' benefit program: this ties into where we started, talking about pausing the indexation for people who rely on AISH. I think an aspect of having a healthy and strong economy, that seems to be lost on this government, is the idea that those who make the least are an important part of our economy. I can tell you that that \$30 that someone on AISH is receiving or that little bit more that someone on the Alberta seniors' benefit would get because of indexation gets spent in our local economy. When you start starving these Albertans from the funds that they need to live and survive, when they're not spending, that starts to stall the economy.

Similarly, when you ask for wage rollbacks from the public sector, when you start firing people: these are all things that harm the economy. In so many ways I disagree with how this government is proceeding.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available should anybody – I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung has the call.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I really was interested in what the member was saying, and I know that she probably has a few more minutes to expound upon the topics that are at hand. I wanted to know if there was anything in particular that affected her constituents that has come up recently with respect to the proposals in Bill 21. Quite often we do have constituents come to our offices with concerns that would directly result immediately upon the announcement or introduction of a piece of legislation in the Legislature. I know that's happened to me with respect to Bill 21. It wasn't just simply a matter of a delayed reaction; it was immediate. We had people phoning the office and appearing in person, wanting to tell their stories about the hardship and the harm and the fear they had as a result of the imposition of proposed legislation.

I would like to know if this is widespread in her constituency as well and if indeed she could provide one or two examples of individuals who specifically expressed the fear that this legislation was going to hurt as much as many of the members of the former opposition talked about when they suggested that rectifying what they thought were the problems with Alberta's economy was going to take measures that were going to hurt. Ultimately, now they're sitting in government, and the Ultimate Cuts and Pain Party is true to its word. It's hurting, and I wouldn't mind hearing the member talk a little bit about some of the individuals who come to her office with their stories of ultimate cuts and pain.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, and thank you to my colleague for that question, because he's absolutely right, through my response to Bill 21 – the impact to my local community is very real, and it's something that I've already heard from constituents about. One of the reasons why I'm so proud to represent Edmonton-Mill Woods is that it's a very unique area. It's a community designed during a housing shortage, during boom times in the '70s. Very interestingly, because it's not that common across Alberta, every neighbourhood in Mill Woods has affordable housing. As a result of having affordable housing in each of the neighbourhoods in my community, I do have a lot of people who are on AISH. I have people who are on fixed seniors' benefits, fixed-income seniors in my constituency, and we have received phone calls, one or two walk-ins, similar to what the member was referring to, people who are really concerned.

One of the things that has not been lost on people coming in is the fact that members of this government voted in support of the indexation of AISH when that was brought forward. They spoke passionately in support of this policy. The UCP, in their platform discussions and in interviews, said that reversing the indexing of AISH is not something that they were going to do. What I've heard from constituents who have stopped in to talk to me is a sense of betrayal and a sense of fear about how already difficult budgets to manage are going to be made worse with the changes in Bill 21.

I really want to emphasize that we are talking about people who rely on a very small amount of money to survive. I find it very difficult when I hear the Premier talk about how we have the most generous benefits now, how we will have the most generous benefits, because we are incredibly privileged as MLAs with generous salaries, and we are talking about people who are living on the bare minimum. That \$30 does make a big difference when somebody is working with so little. I know this because I have talked to the constituents that this impacts: to the seniors; to the people on AISH; to the university students who are concerned about rising tuition; to the parents who are concerned that they may not be able to send their son or daughter to university and have that be fully paid for, instead relying on loans. The interest on those loans is going up. There are so many different measures here that are quite concerning.

7:50

I've also, not only at my constituency office, watched a lot of the discussion on social media with a lot of anger and a lot of surprise. I've seen more than one comment from somebody who voted UCP who says: this is not what I thought I was voting for; this was not what they said during the election. In fact, again, they specifically said that they would not do these things.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there other members looking to speak to the bill? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung has risen.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me pleasure this evening to rise to speak to Bill 21. I first started off by speaking a little bit about the size of the document and what it actually means to have a bill of this size containing measures of this kind. What it means is that we're facing what's commonly known as an omnibus bill, a bill that has, presumably, many measures that have some relation to one another, but that's not necessarily the case.

I don't recall, when we were in government, that we ended up in an exercise such as this, where we had a bill as large and with so many disparate parts coming together. This one is a prime example of what many, over time, in parliamentary parlance would deem to

be a rather elephantine piece of legislation that realistically could have been divided into many separate parts, that would have allowed much more defined and, I think, intelligent debate. Not to denigrate any of the words that have been spoken in the House so far on this piece of legislation, but the dissection of some of these pieces of legislation, which bear no resemblance one to the other, probably would have been in the interest of healthy debate and also in the interest of the people of Alberta, who really have a right to fully comprehend exactly what the intent of the legislation is in its small components.

I think that a lot of the measures are intended to be sort of hidden by their own volume. It's unfortunate that the government has chosen to operate this way with such a large omnibus bill. I won't beat that element to death. I just wanted to register my thoughts on the strategy the government has used, to stack numerous measures that are proposed in Bill 21 so that they can employ the principle: if you throw so much against the wall, people won't have an opportunity to fully digest it. That, of course, Mr. Speaker, is what we intend to assist with in our debates here, including tonight, on Bill 21.

The bill is an omnibus bill, as I mentioned, that I think attempts to create a smokescreen and looks to follow the theme of the government's war room where they create and pick fights with people and divide them. I would caution members of the government that when you do pick fights and divide people and create a smokescreen, you play with fire and you can get burned. People who feel that they're under attack will fight back.

I think evidence of that is shown by the number of constituents who are visiting our offices or who are calling and e-mailing, very upset and distraught in many cases, over the effects that they see Bill 21 proposes and will have on their livelihood, their life, their ability to live, and in particular over how much of an effect it's going to have on their children, particularly children of low-income families and particularly where there's a single parent involved, most often a mother. The stresses that these families are under already are burdensome right now, and the government is piling on to the costs that these families face. The stress that I sense in the phone calls that I'm getting is nuanced by many different elements of the government's policy that are now coming to bear on their budget, on the family budgets of low-income people, who seem to be the favourite target of this government. It's shameful, in my view, that they would see fit, in what many have deemed very petty ways, to nickel and dime families who are least able to afford to pay more in their strapped position.

For example, we've talked in this House already about the so-called temporary suspension of the indexation of benefits for AISH, the assured income for the severely handicapped. That is something that is unthinkable, is unconscionable, and many in the province – many pundits, many commentators, many letters to the editor, certainly every MLA in the opposition on this side of the House – can't believe that the government saw fit to actually go ahead and do this, to deindex the benefits for assured income for the severely handicapped, especially in a situation where that was something they just recently achieved and fought for.

We finally, as a government ourselves, were able to make that happen and give a small increase to AISH payments. It still wasn't as far as we would have hoped to have gone to increase and improve benefits for those who are really at the bottom rung of our economic spectrum, yet this government saw fit to dial that back. Perhaps you're hearing those individuals coming into your offices, MLAs' offices for members of the government, the desperation in the voices of these people who are wondering aloud how in the heck they're going to make ends meet. How are they going to see their way clear to ending up having around \$30 a month less in actual

dollar power and spending power as a result of this deindexation? That's on an annual basis, and it's ongoing.

It's interesting to note that if one does a bit of research on other governments in the past in this country who have temporarily deindexed the benefits for those on low incomes, no matter what they happened to be, whether it was direct benefits of assistance or whether it was tax bracket alterations or, to use the word the government likes to use, to pause the indexation of such benefits or tax brackets, the average length of time which these pauses tended to last seems to be about 15 years. Some pause. These people can look forward to a long period of time of suffering from loss of this indexation if indeed history is any indicator on this topic.

Now, I would suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that if indeed the government changes in this province and we were to assume power once the next election is over, we would see a lot shorter period of time when this measure was in place. We would once again put in place the indexation of benefits for AISH recipients and, hopefully, also improve the actual benefit itself.

It was surely a shock to everybody on AISH in this province and all the family members who know somebody or who have a family member on AISH and everybody in the province who tried to imagine living on under \$1,700 a month that this government saw fit to yank the carpet from underneath the feet of these folks and deindex them. It's attacking the people with the lowest possible income and income supports. It was an expression in letters to the editor that I hope resounded at the cabinet table and in the caucus room of the government very, very strongly, because this is a measure that I really think the government has an opportunity to save some face on and to rescind as part of this proposed Bill 21.

I really strongly believe that it will be an Achilles heel for this government and it will be wise for them to recognize that it probably wasn't the smartest thing to do, to deindex AISH. It really doesn't bode well for them.

8:00

What it does is hurt people; it hurts the people that really need our help. This government purportedly was one that was looking after individuals who needed help in the face of growing jobs and the economy, yet that's not what they're doing. They're basically balancing the books on the backs of our poorest people. It leaves a bad taste in the mouths of Albertans, who have a great sense of fair play. Certainly, people in this province are proud of the hard work that they do, but they also recognize that not everybody is born equal, with equal abilities to sustain themselves, and we have a responsibility to help individuals who do need it and rely upon it.

Yet to do what we've done in this measure alone is something that's a stain upon the record of this government and, I would dare say, in the history of this province. Hopefully, they recognize how brutal this is appearing to be as a behaviour on the part of the government and decide to rescind at least this measure; if not others, at least this measure. Every government has some Achilles heel, and this one, I think, is something that will really be damaging. It's not going to die down. It won't go home. It's a chicken that's come home to roost, and roost indeed it will in perpetuity unless the government sees fit to rescind this motion.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that you get the drift that I'm very, very upset that this indexation has been suspended or paused, and I intend to keep hammering on it until I see some movement on the part of the government. If they don't, I'll be one on this side of the House, joined by all my colleagues, who will rail against it, a nonstop campaign on behalf of those individuals who are suffering as a result of this very heartless – heartless – measure.

I also wanted to talk a little bit about the income support for the seniors' lodge program. It's something that we've grown to rely upon in this province, and it's something that I know back from the days when my own grandmother was a village councillor and deputy mayor in Thorhild, where they were in a big battle to get the lodge as the county seat in Thorhild versus Redwater, who wanted it as well. Thorhild ended up getting that lodge, and that was a huge feather in their cap.

The ability for people to live in place in their own village after retirement is something that people cherish. It's a right, it's an opportunity that people cherish, especially in Small Town, Alberta, in rural Alberta, which this government so happily purports to represent and whose interests they have at heart, according to them. Yet here they are in their retirement years, when people want to retire in their community, close to home, close to perhaps where they were farming, and supports for the seniors' lodge program are being cut back by measures contained in Bill 21. That leaves people in villages like Thorhild and Redwater or Spedden or Warspite or wherever you happen to be in Alberta where there are found these seniors' lodges, which are really the pride of the province – they were something that was a job well done in the past by past governments to provide these affordable housing locations within the local residential areas of rural Alberta, in particular, and now they're being threatened.

People are scratching their heads, basically asking the same thing as those who have had their AISH indexation suspended. They're asking: "What the heck did I ever do to you? What did I do to deserve this kind of treatment?" They didn't expect this kind of behaviour from a government that was elected to look after those who are least able to look after themselves but is now simply paying lip service to that claim. In real terms, they're going backwards. They're backsliding on those promises when it comes to AISH recipients and our valued seniors who are looking to retire with dignity in their home communities.

Mr. Speaker, I'm doubly disappointed on these two measures alone, but there are many, many more. This omnibus bill goes on at length, and it spares no age group or no pocket of our population when it comes to them facing the axe from the Unending Cuts and Pain Party.

The tuition freeze that we had in place as a government for three years is something I'll talk about a little later on today.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, I see the hon. Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction has risen under 29(2)(a).

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to comment on some of the things the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung said. In April of this year Albertans had to make a decision. They had to make a decision on whether or not they were going to follow a plan presented by the NDP to get our financial house in order. They rejected that because they did not believe that the NDP were serious or that they could. In fact, they took a look at the past record of the NDP: six credit downgrades in four years, an all-time record; going from \$13 billion to \$63 billion in debt; some of the highest deficits that this province has ever seen. I think that what they asked was: really, do we feel like these wraparound services are in jeopardy under an NDP plan? They recognized that they were in jeopardy in terms of sustainability.

So this government said: in order for us to be able to provide these wraparound services, that we hold so dear in Alberta, for those people who need them, we have to be able to get our financial house in order to be able to have those wraparound services for future generations. We are not a government just for today. We are a government for our future generations, and when we spend their

inheritance, what they have as wraparound services – education, health care – we do a terrible disservice to our children and our grandchildren.

Unfortunately, the NDP continue to talk about how bad this is, but let's be realistic. The truth is that there are \$1,400 AISH payments that go out every month to individuals. This is a third higher than the closest jurisdiction to us. [interjections] Sorry; \$1,700. I appreciate that.

Really, again, the position that the NDP have taken is a position where they say that this deindexing is actually pulling money away. The truth is that we have never had indexing in this province – never – since I believe 1979. Now, the members opposite – this is actually considered in their argument as a smokescreen. They're angry at us for having a real, credible strategy and plan to get ourselves in balance so that we can have sustainability of these wraparound services. This is the reality that Albertans were faced with on April 16, and this is the reason why a million Albertans gave us a mandate to get our financial house in order, because they do feel that it's important to have these wraparound services. Because of that, the NDP are upset with the decision that Albertans made.

We have a reasonable, credible plan to get ourselves back to balance so that we have sustainability in this province, and this is the reason why Albertans have chosen us to carry forward the flag for Alberta and to work for our most vulnerable.

8:10

It is disingenuous for the members opposite to continue to talk about how we are destroying the future of these programs when, in reality, we are making them sustainable. It's sad to see them grandstand on this issue, especially on the most vulnerable people of our province. For them to do that is deplorable, Mr. Speaker, and I don't believe that it serves those people who are in these positions well at all. We can talk about disagreements with our budget. That is exactly what we're supposed to be doing in here. But to grandstand on the people who are on AISH, our seniors: this is the worst kind of politics. What we should be talking about is who has a credible plan to be able to help get Alberta back on track for the sustainable programs that we have. That's really what we need to be doing.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, are there any other members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West has risen.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to offer some of my thoughts on Bill 21, which proposes to do a number of things, including suspending indexation of benefits for the assured income for the severely handicapped income support and the seniors' lodge program.

I find it interesting to be following the Member for Taber-Warner who, not a year ago, on November 28, 2018, speaking to the matter of indexing AISH in legislation, that very member: "We believe that this is actually a fairly good, common-sense amendment and that the bill was good and that it's something that needs to be done, yet here we hear once again how bad we are for accepting it, supporting it, and voting for it." Less than a year ago, Mr. Speaker, this particular MLA voicing support for Bill 26 at the time, An Act to Combat Poverty and Fight for Albertans with Disabilities. I guess we are not combatting poverty and fighting for Albertans with disabilities anymore, and for what, precisely? A deficit that is \$2 billion higher than the NDP, a debt that is coming in within 3 per cent of the NDP, for personal income tax hikes on every single one of us, and a number of other measures in Bill 21 that will make life

less affordable, including ending the tuition freeze, increasing student loan interest rates, and increasing people's electricity bills.

Now, the Member for Taber-Warner was not the only person to speak in favour of indexing AISH at that time. We also had the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul:

This indexing to CPI will greatly benefit all support recipients who have been waiting for years for an adjusted amount that reflects today's cost-of-living increases.

I guess we are no longer going to be giving those amounts. I will go on.

We've heard, devastatingly, from AISH advocates that some cannot even afford basic necessities. This is absolutely unacceptable.

I guess it's acceptable now for people to not be able to afford basic necessities. It's \$30 a month, roughly, in the first year, but through the power of compounding it will be more in subsequent years. We know it's not temporary. The fact of the matter is that maybe we should go back to the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul one more time:

Every Albertan, as a base, should be confident in their ability to afford personal hygiene products and necessities. There is absolutely no one who should worry if this will be impossible for them.

Now there will be thousands of people who are thinking about their meal planning for the week. That's what AISH recipients in my constituency of Lethbridge-West have told me. That's what indexing means to them. That's why we did it, and that's why a little over a year ago this bill passed with the support of many of the members in this House, including the member who just stood up and said that we were the ones grandstanding. Well, it sounds to me like voting for Bill 26 a year ago was the dictionary definition of grandstanding, of saying one thing to get elected, to tell a story to people, a disingenuous story as it turns out, and then doing exactly another for the most vulnerable people. It is completely unnecessary. The actual number of dollars we are talking about pales in comparison to other matters that have been made a priority by the members across the way.

I notice here, too, that we have changes to the seniors' lodge program, the seniors' benefits. There are a number of seniors' lodges in Lethbridge and surrounding area. Free political advice: these folks vote. I have met with many of them. Some of them are in Lethbridge-East; some of them are in Lethbridge-West. Some of them are in Coaldale; some of them are out in Picture Butte and elsewhere. I don't remember ever going into a seniors' lodge and seeing a piece of UCP literature that said that rental supplement programs were going to change, saying that people were going to get less on seniors' lodge programs, saying that older Albertans were going to get kicked off the seniors' drug program or any of the other seniors' initiatives that we find in this budget that are enabled by Bill 21. I don't recall anyone ever campaigning on that to the thousands of seniors who live in Lethbridge-East and Lethbridge-West.

But you know what, Mr. Speaker? They're talking to me now. They are not impressed. They are not impressed at all, and there are a great number of them in Lethbridge-East who are wondering exactly what they were sold by this UCP government. They're wondering why they are the ones to have to pay for a \$4.7 billion tax cut. I'll continue to talk to them in Lethbridge-West and Lethbridge-East because somebody has to stand up for seniors. Somebody has to stand up for adults with severe disabilities and complex needs.

Somebody has to stand up for students, too. Lethbridge is known for two things, as I shared with the House last night, seniors and students. We have a number of students who come from elsewhere

to do their undergraduate degrees at the U of L, and it is also a place where many folks who come from rural communities come in, and they end up settling in Lethbridge. They are not amused that their student loan interest is going up. I don't remember ever seeing that in the volumes that were produced as part of the UCP platform. They were not honest about that at all. I don't remember ever seeing anything for the parents who are sending their students to the University of Lethbridge about ending their tuition and education tax credits either. So we have a number of pieces here that are going to have consequences, Mr. Speaker.

You know, Lethbridge-East elected a Liberal from 1992 to 2012, and Bridget Pastoor served in this House for many, many years. She has been a good friend and mentor to me. She was enormously successful in politics, both at city council and at being an opposition member from Lethbridge, because she spent an awful lot of time talking to seniors in Lethbridge-East. You know, those folks have a lot of voting power. They show up to vote, and no one ever told them that they were going to be losing these kinds of benefits within seven months of this government taking office. They made haste to go after seniors and their pocketbooks.

You know, it's really interesting, some of the rationale for Bill 21. One might find it on page 131 of the business plan, in which in some ways it sort of says that it's a problem that seniors' incomes are higher than in the rest of the country. I'm hoping for this particular performance indicator that the idea here isn't to push that performance indicator down by pushing down the incomes of the lowest income seniors. It will be noticed. It will be noticed in southern Alberta. It'll be noticed at the Alberta Rose Lodge, which is in Lethbridge-East. It'll be noticed at the Blue Sky Lodge in Lethbridge-East. It'll be noticed at the Heritage Lodge, right in downtown west Lethbridge. It'll be noticed at the Pemmican Lodge in downtown west Lethbridge. It'll be noticed at the Golden Acres Lodge, which is in Lethbridge-East. It'll be noticed at the Piyami Lodge in Picture Butte. It'll be noticed at the Sunny South Lodge in Coaldale.

8:20

Mr. Speaker, there are political consequences for going after low-income people's standard of living. The hubris is still strong. It's wafting from the other side of the House, but I have a feeling – I have a feeling – that when Albertans get a good sense of what this government is doing through Bill 21 and who they are targeting to bear the brunt of their \$4.7 billion tax cut, the tone will begin to change, or perhaps the arrogance will become more hardened. I'm not sure.

Anyway, moving on to allowing the Health minister to place conditions on new practitioner identification numbers: of course, this is unconstitutional. You know, barely a bill goes by where this government doesn't take the opportunity to find a way to back up a dump truck of cash onto some lawyer's lawn because it contains within it something that will be challenged. In this case, it will be that because it has already been struck down in two provinces, Mr. Speaker. Now, there are ways to work with the Alberta Medical Association, without abrogating people's Charter rights, to ensure that we have rural health care. These things can be done. We have some experience with this on this side of the House. Certainly, the Albertan Medical Association probably has some good ideas for how to affect that particular public policy and those outcomes as well, but we're not finding that in here. We're just finding an affection for the hammer of doing things that are against the law.

Of course, next step, we have changes to the master agreement with the Alberta Medical Association, going back to seniors, who are folks who use the health care system. Now, there is no question that reform of physician compensation was a matter that took up a

lot of bandwidth for the past four years and even prior to us, because the physician agreements were something that was grappled with in the Stelmach and Redford governments as well. There is no question about this. Having said that, allowing unilateral changes to the master agreement will prompt a war with doctors, and who will suffer? It will not be the people in this House. It will not be the wealthy donors and the people who were funnelling money through dark-money PACs to elect the members across the way. No. It will be patients. It will be seniors who live in the lodges that I just listed into the record, Mr. Speaker.

Now, finally, I don't ever recall anyone campaigning in the election on having fewer cops on the street. That is not something that I remember anyone taking a position on. It would have been a rather alarming position to take, especially given some of the issues we've seen in particular with drug trafficking and so on in southern Alberta. I don't ever remember anyone taking a position that we should have fewer police, certainly not the party of so-called law and order.

We see neither thing in this bill. We've certainly seen an unconstitutional move around physicians: so not so much enamoured with the law. Allowing changes to the master agreement: not so enamoured with order. Certainly, many of the changes in terms of changing through regulation how municipalities pay for policing: also not terrifically orderly. I'm noticing out there that the municipalities aren't exactly going wild for this proposed change in Bill 21, Mr. Speaker. I'm not seeing a parade of validators for the minister's news conference in which he takes a victory lap on some of these changes that are hidden in Bill 21; in fact, quite the opposite. I am seeing a number of municipalities wondering how they are going to make sure that those police stay on the street and how they're going to fund that, given the changes that are also contemplated here in terms of changing how the province uses fine money that it collects on behalf of municipalities.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'll conclude my remarks with this. I think there are a number of things in this bill, and that is by its very nature. It is an omnibus bill designed such that there are so many different things in it that, you know, the opposition will stand up and they will say their piece, but a lot of the things will get lost in the shuffle. So I think, at the end of the day, what's going to be noticed are the things that hit people on their bottom line and the very, very cynical moves, in particular doing things that nobody campaigned on. Nobody really campaigned on higher electricity rates, although that is what this bill contemplates. Nobody campaigned on more of your disposable income after graduation going to student loan interest. Nobody campaigned, certainly, on ending indexation of benefits to AISH; in fact, quite the opposite. Both parties campaigned on indexing AISH. Apparently, only one had the intention of doing what they said they were going to do.

You know, in politics I have noticed that a lot of people have a lot of time for politicians regardless of their political stripe if they just follow through on what they said they were going to do. I can't tell you how many times I've had this conversation with Albertans, and I'm sure many of the folks in this Chamber have, too. You know, "Say what you will about Ralph Klein," people used to say, "he did what he said he was going to do."

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has risen on 29(2)(a).

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank my friend from Lethbridge-West for her comments on this legislation. She spent a lot of time talking about the impacts that this legislation will

have on a number of people in her community, and I want to thank her for that.

I want to know if she would like to expand on the impacts that she sees to Lethbridge with the increases in tuition that this government is foisting upon students. Given that Lethbridge is a city of higher learning, with both the University of Lethbridge and Lethbridge College in a city of about a hundred thousand people, the student population is a significant portion of the population. We know that a lot of the students who attend university or college in Lethbridge come from out of town, so I'd like to know what impact driving students away from Lethbridge College and Lethbridge University, through these tuition increases and other ways that this government is making life more expensive for students, will have on the economy of Lethbridge now and on the future of Lethbridge. What will Lethbridge look like if it can't train people with skills for jobs for the future and can't train people to be citizens who are engaged in public life, the way that our government did? I'm eager to hear the Member for Lethbridge-West's thoughts on that issue.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, with three minutes, 20 seconds left.

Ms Phillips: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. In the limited time I have, I think the biggest thing to underline is that when students have disposable income, when they have a summer job, when their tuition costs are under control, then you really do see in the months from September to the end of April quite a large uplift in terms of activity, particularly in the shoulder seasons – of course, in the winter it's a little bit different – in the downtown, for small businesses in the downtown. You see young people out and about a lot more, and when you talk to small businesses that are part of the business revitalization zone, the downtown BRZ, they will tell you the kind of purchasing power that both students, faculty, and support staff at the university and the college have, and that is really keeping a lot of the small businesses alive, quite frankly, in Lethbridge. So I think any reduction in FTEs that comes as a result of cuts or a reduction in disposable income that comes as a result of skyrocketing tuition will have an effect. There's no question. It will very likely have an effect as well on the housing and rental markets, and it will certainly have an effect on other associated services such as food banks, the health care system, counselling, and so on.

8:30

You know, the multiplier effects, in a positive way, of these two institutions, the college and the university, are very easy to see in the city and, in fact, the public service more generally; 20 per cent of the GDP of Lethbridge comes from the public service, about 1 in 5 dollars. That is an important driver of the economy because it is a regional health care hub, it is a regional seniors' care hub, as I described, and it is a regional education hub as well.

It bears noting that it's not just the tuition changes, but the changes to agricultural research will have a profound effect on the city's economy as well. At the end of the day, the moves around postsecondary and, in particular, to put ever more of that burden on students will mean a decreased amount of economic activity in the downtown. There's no question about that. Indeed, the University of Lethbridge Students' Union wrote a letter today expressing their dismay with this government's choice to, quote, put the debt on the backs of students. Too bad for them: the debt will still be on their backs, but they will also be paying more.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows has risen to speak to second reading of Bill 21.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise in the House to speak to Bill 21, Ensuring Fiscal Sustainability Act, 2019. I just wanted to say that indeed I will not be supporting this bill. The reason why I'm not supporting this bill is not really based on philosophical articles or readings or my point of view. My arguments that I'm having against this bill are coming more from real life, what is exactly happening, the feedback in my riding and in my communities.

To put this into perspective, when I was looking at the bill, you know, I tried to visualize what exactly we're trying to address in this House with regard to, I will say, the fortune of Albertans. The last few days I tried to visualize exactly what we're seeing with numbers like \$4.7 billion, those billions. I tried to actually visualize those numbers: what do those numbers look like? When I came up with the information, I was surprised. When we were discussing every time a \$4.7 billion cut, a giveaway to big corporations, something came up on the Internet like this: one of the demographical visualizations will show that this is something like, in weight, 94,000 pounds or that this is a stack of bills 600 kilometres tall or long. So you can imagine, when we're talking about \$4.7 billion, what we are discussing here. Many of the members of this House, I'm very sure, probably would not have experience handling practically \$4.7 billion. That's why we will probably not see the direct impact, you know, of what we're trying to discuss here.

The other thing is it's not only the \$4.7 billion, that amount of money that I'm talking about, all the way from here to probably past Lethbridge, the stack of bills, the amount of money, but also the government's path to address, to fund that money, you know, on the backs of the not even, I would say, average Albertan. Looking at Bill 21, it's the most vulnerable people who need that very support, the ones that the government, I think, has determined to help, the people of their jurisdiction, in this case Albertans, the people who would expect the government to stand up, to have their back. But in this case the government actually picked those people to fund all those big corporations in the name of creating jobs.

In fact, it has been proven not only in Alberta. We have seen in the past six, seven months that my colleagues the members of this side of the House have been arguing that, you know, this experience has already been proven in many jurisdictions in the world that it does not really create that so-called trickle-down effect. All that happened is that the corporations were happy to put the money in their pockets and then probably find a place where they see that it is maybe more reasonable and wiser for them to go to do business and make a bigger profit.

That's exactly what we're seeing here in Alberta with Husky Energy: \$233 million. In fact, I will come to the point where the members on this side of the House are trying to discuss the effect on AISH recipients, students, and other vulnerable people. The one company that pocketed \$233 million from this government, all they did was handed out pink slips to their workers, and now they are announcing that they are going somewhere else to invest.

One more company, EnCana: \$54 million. Those kinds of amounts we can never imagine in our life, and you can expect what those most vulnerable people would probably understand about those amounts. EnCana has already pocketed that money, and they are not entrusted to create jobs. They are just looking at where they can make much more profit easier. They have made an announcement to move out of the province.

Given the evidence, it is not just us. It's everywhere, and I think that the government members also acknowledge this. The biggest problem is that the government is still not willing to listen. To fund that \$4.7 billion, the very painful thing we're discussing here is that the government picked the people that are called the severely

handicapped. You know, when I'm discussing this, the severely handicapped, "severely" is a key word in this.

I am emphasizing "severely" because I have been involved in such a real case for the last two months, where an individual is suffering from multiple sclerosis and is completely in a wheelchair. His wife is trying to look after him 24 hours and somehow managed to get two hours of a job to maintain her household expenses. She lost that very job a month ago. So I'm working with that family. They sold their car – they cannot afford their car anymore – and they can hardly pay their rent. Last month she asked me: "Please, find me a job or find a solution. We do not really have money for groceries this month."

8:40

This is what this government is doing. When it comes to serving your people, that is the duty we have in this House. This is what this UCP party had actually committed to those people in the election. They did not actually run the election on the agenda that they would come after those very vulnerable people and make them pay \$4.7 billion that they weren't campaigning on.

It's not only this. I'm also, you know, involved with another family. They have a special-needs child, and their whole family style has been changed. The mother cannot go to work anymore. She cannot, you know, afford to be the same person anymore even though the child has grown to be 10 or 12 years old. But it's not time that the mom can tell the child to get up and get ready, we're going to go the store or we're going to go to the school.

Those are the people who need support mostly, and the government turns their back to them. The government is still thinking that by funding \$4.7 billion – it has been proven in the last seven months that Alberta has lost 27,000 jobs, instead of creating, instead of helping anything in Alberta.

The other thing I just wanted to discuss is not only what the government is trying to address in this Bill 21. It's not one sentence of those lines, I would say, when they said that they're ending the tuition freeze, you know, suspending the tuition cap. You need to see the direction and the systemic moves they're making.

It was not long ago when they rolled back the youth worker wage. We argued that the youth worker wage is very critical for those young people to save money for their higher education, to maintain the expenses. Sometimes the parents are not able to support, and in many cases they help the family with earning that little money.

The government so badly went after those people, and they didn't stop there. I can see the move in this bill. I don't know what's going to be next after this. Now the government suspended the tuition cap. Not only that, they have also raised the interest on their loans. So the average student will probably end up paying \$4,000, \$4,500 more in their yearly tuition fee. So that is a move.

The government, I think, failed to understand about all those young people. It's not only the future of those young people; it is the future of this province. When those people go to universities, join programs, they are not only trying to progress their own career. They're trying at the same time, you know, to contribute to their own field with the expertise they will get to make this place better for all.

This is the key point I think this UCP government has failed to recognize: the funding of our schools, the funding of our universities. Standing behind these young people is not only critical to help those people, but it's also very crucial to save the future of our province and the future of our country.

The other thing I really wanted to mention is something that Bill 21 is trying to address. Bill 21 will give more powers to the minister to intervene and make decisions with regard to the family physicians and doctors, where they can work. I don't know. The

government probably is trying to do it with good intentions, but I would expect that on this, then, the government has a whole lot of resources when they're looking into something and coming up with the decisions to change the direction, to move to help the province. They would have, actually, the work done.

I'm coming from places where the governments have moved in that direction, but it had in no way helped the people, the young people and the people of those jurisdictions. That had become more and more, I would say, part of controversies where these kinds of powers are mostly used to penalize your opponents when it comes to – it has opened the way to corruption even, in many cases.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has risen.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for his comments. I really appreciate the stories he's been telling so far. I was wondering if during this exchange he might be able to elaborate on some of the things he heard from folks during the election campaign. Did he hear from any seniors who said, "You know, I understand our drug coverage is too rich; maybe it should be rolled back"? Did he hear from anyone on AISH: "You know, I understand that we get about a third more than other provinces, so I think my AISH should be rolled back"? Did he hear from seniors who live in his riding: "You know, I understand that maybe my own income shouldn't be indexed"? I definitely didn't hear any of those things, and I'm wondering if the member could talk about that. Did he hear from students who said: "You know, I think my student loan payment should go up. I think that my tax credit should be eliminated"? Did he hear any of those things when he was door-knocking? If not, what are some of the things that he did hear from those groups that he would have liked to have seen addressed in a government omnibus bill about the budget?

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

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's the biggest thing I just wanted to emphasize. During the election the UCP in this case did not really – I just wanted to find the parliamentary word. Did they campaign on what they intended to do after winning the election? This is the biggest thing.

When I was going door to door, yes, in fact, jobs were biggest of the concerns in my riding and probably in most parts of Alberta. When the leader of the UCP rented or bought a blue truck, travelled from one corner to the other corner, there was only one slogan: They Will Create Jobs. There was no discussion that when we get in power, we will fund those big corporations, and the ordinary Albertans or the most vulnerable people of this province will be obliged to pay those big corporations, because somehow, you know, the leader of the UCP kind of had, I would say, the passion or something he thought about, that this was something, his obligation to do so.

But now, seven months into the government, when we talk to the students, when we talk to the seniors, the people are worried. The people probably differ from the UCP's ideas on a lot of stuff, but now they're angry. Now they're scared. This was not even something in discussion, so what's going to happen now?

8:50

As the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, you know, asked me about this, I just wanted to mention that during the break today I was trying to address the issue where a senior right now actually needs to go to a facility, but the facility cost will be approximately \$2,000 to \$2,100, and he's not in a position to come up with that kind of amount. So during this afternoon for a few hours I was just

working on that case. I was trying to see what kind of help is available, how I can just be involved in this to help that individual and family.

This is the reality I'm bringing on. I'm not just discussing bringing the philosophical debate here, the articles or writings from one or the other journal. This is the reality. This is what is happening on the ground. The government members need to realize.

Then, talking to youth. My own son, you know, goes to NAIT, and this is his second year. It was quite challenging even paying for his fees last year, and when he is looking at this increase, he is looking at me.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has risen to speak.

Member Ceci: I appreciate that, Mr. Speaker. You know, I have of course looked at this bill in detail along with my colleagues and listened to debate and want to touch on some of the things that have been mentioned tonight but also to kind of put my own spin on things.

First of all, you know, we all got into politics to help Albertans out. Politics is absolutely about choices. I can tell you that when I got elected in 2015, it was when things were crashing in our economy in this province. People remember that. They started before the election in May of 2015. In late 2014 the economy started going downhill pretty rapidly and led to Premier Prentice at the time pulling the trigger one year early on an election so he could get in front of all of that, Mr. Speaker. He wasn't successful, and the leader of the NDP captured the hearts and minds of Albertans. We were a government, and 54 or 55 of us sat on that side. It's about choices. During the most difficult recession Alberta has had in two generations anyway, we made choices that would have the backs of Albertans. We made choices that would protect Albertans through one of the deepest, darkest economic times in this province.

Former Vice-president Joe Biden says, when people come up to him and say, you know, what they value and all of that sort of thing, "Show me your budget." I would argue that we could show him this bill and we could show him the budget presented by the government, and he would judge that to be wanting. He says, "Show me your budget, and I'll tell you what you value." I don't think it takes very much investigation to see that the other side values a \$4.7 billion corporate handout more than they value the struggling Albertans who need their assistance. I've heard repeatedly from that side over the last several weeks: we will be there for the most vulnerable. Well, Mr. Speaker, they are going to put more and more Albertans in that position as a result of what they are doing.

I want to put on the record that when we came into government, the economy was going down, as I said. There was a retrenchment or a retraction of the GDP, about 4 per cent in 2015 and about the same amount in 2016. But in 2017 and '18, Mr. Speaker, the economy came back in this province, and it came back by about 4-plus per cent in 2017 and about 2.8 per cent in 2018. Now, this year, it's less than half a per cent, and that side has overseen the disinvestment in this province that's resulting from their \$4.7 billion corporate handout not stimulating the economy. In fact, it does stimulate shareholders of EnCana and Husky and every other energy company. Some are staying here, and others are leaving to make their domicile in the United States or other places. It does stimulate them, but it's not stimulating the economy. As a result, Albertans are worse off as a result of the actions propagated by the UCP government.

Before I go too much further, let me also put on the record that, you know, contrary to what we hear from the other side all the time,

Alberta under the NDP government had the lowest net debt to GDP of all the provinces and still has the lowest net debt to GDP of all the provinces. We would have balanced one year later than they propose that they're going to balance. At that point, Alberta under us would have still had the lowest net debt to GDP. Independent economists, Mr. Speaker, when they look at Alberta's balance sheet, say that it's the healthiest in the country. It was under us; it's still the healthiest in the country.

But the issue that will make it problematic going forward and problematic for our economy is that Bill 21 makes life more expensive for Albertans, all sorts of Albertans. I'll just touch on some of those areas where I disagree profoundly with what's in Bill 21. The bill takes off the legislated cap on tuitions. What we know about tuition is that it forms a substantive part of the cost of going to postsecondary school. When I went, there were grants and loans, and those things have been eroded and will be eroded by this UCP government. Tuition, for instance, can go up 7 per cent per year – and I think that in this bill or the information we've received from the budget over the last couple of weeks, it can go up 7 per cent per year – and it's likely to go up 21 per cent over three years. Can you imagine, Mr. Speaker, young people looking at their futures and trying to decide if they can afford to go to school?

You know, this province is blessed with great natural resources, and when we say that, in many cases people focus only on oil and gas, maybe agriculture, too. They focus on what's under our feet in this province. Of course, we didn't have anything to do with that. That was put there by God and geology.

But the other natural resource that gets overlooked all the time is our population, our people, our young people in particular, Mr. Speaker. Young people are what drive this province forward. We're the youngest province of all the provinces in the country. We have the most talented people in education, and we want them to continue to be able to afford to go to postsecondary education so they can be the sources of solving the difficult conundrums or wicked problems that we're experiencing in this province and in this world at this time like climate change, like poverty, like how best to address the health issues that all people experience, like Alzheimer's and dementia. We need young people to be our greatest natural resource, and they can't be that greatest natural resource if they are burdened by huge costs to go to school.

9:00

When parents have children, Mr. Speaker, they very much start planning right away for those kids. Of course, what parent doesn't want their child to go to college or trade school or postsecondary to make the best life for themselves as they can possibly make and be fulfilled and have fulfilling lives? But it's going to be challenging under Bill 21 and this UCP government to ensure that all Albertans who want to get to school have that opportunity.

Universities are expensive enough, Mr. Speaker, and that side is making them more expensive. During our time in government, when the legislated cap was on for tuitions, for the whole time we were in government, we were able to see our most expensive universities, the most expensive in the country, come down in price. During our time we saw our universities become the third-least expensive in the country as a result of our work. You know, that promise that parents make to their children when they're born, that promise that we should all have with the young people coming up and having their backs, that's being eroded as a result of Bill 21.

This bill hurts families significantly, Mr. Speaker, not only in the education area that I've just talked about but also because it creates greater inequality amongst Albertans in this province. Families, for instance, need access to health care. When parents have young ones,

there are so many times when they really need to be getting the comfort and direction of a doctor or a primary care nurse or other sorts of things.

This bill, as André Picard in the *Globe* today indicated, is bound to fail because of the restrictions it places on where doctors can work. It breaks the contracts, essentially, that we have with doctors. You know, with doctors, it's: you come to our province, and if you want to set up practice and you want to work within the system the AMA has, that's totally okay. André Picard talked about the unconstitutionality of these actions that have been taking place. [interjection] It's alarming that people come in here and don't have the decorum of the House. I would just say that it's alarming that this bill breaks the contract it has with doctors and tells them where they can work, essentially, by restricting payments to doctors.

Mr. Speaker, that is bound to fail. It's failed in other provinces, and it's bound to fail here. It's no way to work with people. When we had, through the former Minister of Health here, a need to work with the doctors, she went and consulted with them. This bill does not consult at all with doctors. In fact, we're finding out more and more things that are in this bill and other bills that have been brought forward by the government that they've not been upfront about, that we're only digging into now and alerting Albertans about the bad bills that are before them.

I want to say that with regard to breaking contracts, as is proposed in this bill, our former Health minister was able to go and get monies back from AMA, and she was able to do that because of discussions with them. We were able to get two zeros, Mr. Speaker, with the broad public sector as a result of discussions with them and essentially saying, you know: work with us. Nothing in Bill 21 is a "work with us." It's our way or the highway, and it's an enforcing kind of action.

The other promises that have been broken that have been made by the other side: it's interesting, Mr. Speaker, if you look at the platform that they ran on, you'll see all sorts of areas where they have made promises, and those promises are broken. One of those areas is in terms of police funding. We see that this bill pulls more than \$40 million out of the two major cities alone over the term of the budget. It does that by increasing fine revenue and jacking up prices that we on this side made sure that were paid for, things like forensic testing. That side seems to nickel and dime and take money out of the hands of police forces across this province while at the same time saying that we're increasing funding. Well, you can't have it both ways; it's one or the other. And the truth of the matter is that they're making life more expensive for families and for institutions like police services in this province.

One area I'm extremely disappointed to have to stand up and talk about, because we were so pleased to put it in place for Alberta and to know that Alberta was leading the pack in this area, which is being retreated by the other side again, is in the whole area of indexation of important social programs, income support programs in this province. What we also hear from the other side is, you know, that this side only got to it, I think, in the fall of 2018, and: "Why did you wait so long to do that? You know, if it was so important to you, why didn't you do it sooner?" Well, I can tell you that there's nothing further from the truth, Mr. Speaker. When we, in fact, did it, we made sure that we had essentially indexed from 2015, when we became government, up to 2019, when it started. We did that first by increasing rates.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to talking some more.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available. I believe the individual who caught my eye was the hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It always helps to see the clock.

I'd like to stand and just respond to my friend across the way. I can remember, of course, when we had the election in 2015 and I was surprised, of course, to see the NDP elected. At that point I wasn't involved in politics. I was practising as a corporate tax lawyer and serving many central Alberta businesses. I had a lot of respect and admiration for those taxpayers that contributed to the economy.

You know, as we kind of witnessed over time – and I'm glad that the former Finance minister just spoke before me. One of the things that really motivated me to run, frankly, was the horrible record of the NDP. In particular, the thing that really troubled me is that I don't feel that the NDP were actually ever serious about living within their means. They had a reckless disregard for that. You know, I always like to deal in facts. I don't like to deal in hyperbole. I like facts, so we'll share some facts with my friends across the way because it's important that all of us learn from our mistakes. You know, I know that our failures can be very valuable teachers, and hopefully we can be better from that.

What happened is that in 2015 the NDP took over government, and the government actually posted in the year in which they were elected a surplus of \$1.1 billion. Then, well, unfortunately, what happened is that in the next year – and I hope they have these numbers memorized, because they should. I expect our former Finance minister – I mean, I certainly hope he remembers these numbers. In '15-16 there was a \$6.4 billion deficit; the following year, '16-17, a \$10.7 billion deficit. You know, it's like they were shooting for the moon. Then we had an \$8 billion deficit, and then in the year that they got turfed, they had a \$6.7 billion deficit.

As I met other individuals in my community, individuals... [interjections] Yeah. I'm going to actually talk about that. In the NDP platform for 2015 they actually said that they were...

9:10

Statement by the Speaker

Interrupting a Member

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Red Deer-South. I just thought that I would bring it to the whole House's attention that obviously individuals should speak through the Speaker. Actually, everybody has a copy of the Standing Orders. If you'd like to look at 13(4)(b), when a member is speaking, as in this case with the hon. Member for Red Deer-South, no person shall "interrupt that member, except to raise a point of order." I think that order and decorum is obviously paramount to this House, and I would like to ensure that I can hear the speaker. There will be ample time for all members in this House to debate. There will also be further 29(2)(a), so please.

If the hon. member could please continue, with about a minute, 52 seconds left on this 29(2)(a).

Debate Continued

Mr. Stephan: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm used to interactive conversations so sometimes I need to check myself on that as well.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I just want to talk about the NDP platform and a couple of things that kind of show their inept ability, unfortunately. They said that they would balance the budget in their platform, by 2018. So what happened? Well, we actually had a \$6.7 billion deficit, so a little bit off there. They don't really understand corporate taxes at all. In their platform they thought, based on their 20 per cent corporate tax

increase, that they would actually have \$3.7 billion more in corporate tax revenue. Guess what happened actually? In terms of their actuals they were \$8.4 billion off, so an overstatement on their corporate tax increases.

You know, I'm concerned that the member opposite suggests that Joe Biden should be our moral compass. I'm not so sure that he's my moral compass. I do want to do what is right, though, and serve the public interest by balancing the budget. That is the best thing that we can do for our children. We need to live within our means; we need to set a good example.

I know I don't have much time, but the member opposite also talked about education. The best thing we can do for our children when they graduate is have a strong economy so that they can graduate and have jobs.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are back on the main bill, Bill 21. Is there anyone else wishing to join in the debate this evening? I see the hon. member – I'm certain that the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo wouldn't be moving around the Chamber while the Speaker is on his feet. Oh, my.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has the call.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, I would like to move the following motion. That second reading of Bill 21 be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 21, Ensuring Fiscal Sustainability Act, 2019, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the Bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

I will take my seat until that is distributed.

The Speaker: Thanks very much.

Hon. members, the amendment will be referred to as REF1.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The amendment I am moving is to refer the substance of this bill to committee, because I think that there is an enormous amount in this bill, and I think that there's an enormous amount in this bill that requires deep consideration. I take that, myself, as an incredibly serious responsibility.

Of course, having heard recently from the Member for Red Deer-South – he obviously thinks he knows everything about government and everything about the world and everything about everything and doesn't need to consider anything seriously, but I disagree. I think that all of us in this place are well served by taking some time to consider the things that we say. I actually think that that hon. member would be extremely well served by a little bit of humility in light of his clear lack of understanding of what's going on.

In any event, on to the bill. One of the reasons I think this ought to be referred to a committee is because there is an enormous amount in this bill. It affects a number of acts. In fact, I believe one of my hon. colleagues before me tried to read into the record just how many acts were amended and ran out of time. A lot of these things are very substantive.

Obviously, the changes to indexing of benefits are incredibly substantive. We've heard a lot about the changes to AISH, and that's a huge concern – I absolutely agree that that's a concern – but I think I'd like to talk also about a number of other benefits that are impacted by this. It isn't just AISH that's not being indexed; it's also seniors' benefits. For a lot of people who aren't in a position to work, won't be ever in a position to likely work in the future – this applies to AISH; it applies to seniors' benefits and a couple of other

programs – this is a huge concern because their income is going to erode over time and for potentially an indefinite period of time, and that makes it very difficult to be able to afford basics. That's certainly a concern. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Member for Calgary-Mountain View has the call. If you'd like to have conversations, you're more than welcome to do so in the lounges.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, sir.

Certainly, that's one of the things that I think is definitely a major concern in this bill.

In addition to deindexing those benefits, there are also Alberta Works benefits, both for expected to work and barriers to full employment. Those often apply to individuals who may ultimately qualify for AISH but don't qualify currently or else individuals who are able to work fully but are just still seeking employment. Those benefits are actually, believe it or not, even tighter than AISH. In a lot of cases Alberta Works payments – well, obviously, in all cases, because it's statutory – are even lower. Those are individuals who have lost their job.

The individuals in barriers to full employment are often individuals who ultimately will qualify for AISH. They're just still in the application process. Certain disabilities sometimes make it more difficult to qualify for AISH. If you have certain types of disabilities, you're less likely to qualify, so those individuals will spend more time in those other programs. Those programs, believe it or not, have an income – not only is the benefit lower than the benefit for AISH, but they also don't have some of the other surrounding supports that impact your rent, subsidies to rent, or that impact your drug costs, those sorts of things. That's, I think, a huge concern, and I think it's worth taking the time to consider.

Obviously, I would be remiss if I didn't reference changes to the Police Act. I certainly think – obviously, we've heard concerns about those. Essentially, the changes themselves within the legislation just enable the Lieutenant Governor in Council, or cabinet, by way of regulation to determine what percentage of policing costs those communities will pay. We have of course heard from a number of communities about their concerns with respect to that because in some cases what we're talking about is potentially a situation where they'll have to raise the property taxes on rural residents by up to \$400. If some of those rural residents are also, at the same moment, on, say, seniors' benefits, which have just lost their indexing, that's a huge cost at the same time that their cost of living is going up and their income is remaining fixed for an indefinite number of years. I think that those are impacts that should be more fully considered.

9:20

In addition, the alteration here with respect to funding for municipal police is, I think, a concern. Certainly, in the context of Calgary it's a big concern because city council in Calgary has been under a lot of pressure, and they were forced to make some reductions. So the Calgary police have already taken a \$7 million reduction, and they've managed to absorb that internally, which is a serious concern for them. In addition to that, this additional \$13 million is going to be more than they can absorb without losing personnel. I know that the members opposite like to talk at length about finding efficiencies. Well, if there were efficiencies to be found, they were already found with the \$7 million. You know, at a certain point the efficiencies have been found.

I think what's worth noting as well – certainly, one of our big tasks when we were in government was to ensure that we were keeping the rate of growth of spending below CPI plus inflation. It

was something that was very important to us because prior to our coming into government, the sort of spending curve sort of looked like a porcupine. It was up and down and up and down with the price of oil. We decided that we didn't want the porcupine anymore, and we sort of wanted to stick to a CPI plus inflation kind of a model, which, I think, is important, and I think it's sustainable.

You know, keeping those costs down: there were areas that were more challenged than others, I guess, is what I'll say. Health, for instance, was a big challenge. I will forever be grateful to my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora, who worked incredibly hard to keep that budget under control and had to make some very tough decisions to make that the case. The reason that health spending grows at that rate is in large part – well, part of it was a contract that my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Glenora was able to fix with the help of the doctors, who very helpfully came to the table and reduced the cost of those contracts by over half a billion dollars a year, which is pretty impressive if you ask me. One might wonder, given their willingness to negotiate, why the current government is doing it this way rather than another, which is just another reason. But my point is that some things have a growth pressure higher than that. The reason the growth pressure is higher than that: in the case of health, a lot of it had to do with the doctors. As I've mentioned, my colleague addressed that.

But another big area of spending was an area of spending having to do with the availability of drugs. The costs of those drugs were going up and, particularly, new biologic drugs that come online. They have some amazing treatments for diseases like hepatitis C, that used to be a lifelong condition that had to be managed. That's actually a good thing, that the growth pressure is higher than CPI plus inflation, because what it means is that we're saving more lives. We're able to diagnose more things, we're able to treat more things, and we're able to save more lives.

I actually think that saving more lives is a good thing to spend money on. I actually don't think that that's something that should be frowned on, and I think, honestly, most people would agree. I think that if it was your loved one, you would absolutely agree. I think that if someone said, "There's a treatment available for your loved one, but we're trying to keep health spending under control, so we're unwilling to approve this new drug, that we know, scientifically, could save that person's life, because of costs," I mean, I don't think anybody in this Chamber would agree to that. That's one of the reasons that there is that kind of pressure.

Policing, interestingly, has similar pressures. They have a tendency to have a pressure to grow a little faster than inflation. That's for a couple of different reasons. One is that police are dealing with sort of more and more complex issues. Again, we understand more things. We now have a much greater understanding of drug addiction issues and issues surrounding mental health, which means that it behooves the police and is, in fact, I would argue, their duty, now that we understand those things, to respond accordingly. That makes their jobs more complex than they otherwise would have been.

Another thing is court decisions that come down that have a tendency to impact the way they do their work. For instance, I can remember that a couple of years ago there was a court decision with respect to production orders and warrants having to do with Facebook. A lot of evidence, obviously, is now on the Internet, on Facebook, that sort of thing, so that decision had a huge impact on the number of hours of work. It massively increased the number of hours of work that go into any investigative file because now they have to write all those warrants, and they take a very long time. Actually, I think it was a production order. In any event, the point is that it increases the amount of work necessary to go into each and every case, and that's what tends to drive those pressures.

Ultimately, rather than having a silly conversation about, "Well, you know, it's just ridiculous to let the budget grow ever," we should have a rational conversation about: as a society, what do we think is worth paying for? These things do cost money. Saving more lives costs money. Protecting more people costs money. So I think that we should take the time to step back and have a reasoned conversation about that because it's important. It affects us all, and I think that at the end of the day, if you asked everyone in the province, "Would you be willing to pay a few more dollars to ensure that your loved one gets the medication they need or has the police able to respond to them?" I think most people would be okay with that. Those are just a few of the issues in the bill.

Now, one of the things that I've just referenced obviously has to do with practice licences and where a physician can practise. Setting aside for a moment the issue of the potential constitutionality, which I think is genuinely in question in that instance, this is potentially a really big concern because it's not clear on what basis those will be doled out, to be perfectly honest. It's not clear where they're going to go or what they're going to do. You know, if they're over the budget line and someone retires in a certain area of the province, are they going to allow another practice licence there? What if people are having to drive farther for care? I think that's a huge concern. You know, there are people already, especially in northern Alberta, who have to drive quite a long way, potentially, to access care. That impacts the relative quality of their care compared to, potentially, other people in the province. I think it's important to know on what basis those decisions are going to be made, so I think it's worth taking the time to consider those decisions.

It's important to know: what are the things we're going to measure? How are we going to determine whether another specialist is needed in an area? How are we going to determine with certainty, you know, how much health care people can have access to, and how do we know? I mean, I've just detailed the reasons that health care, much like the cost of policing, tends to grow faster than population and inflation growth. What if the government, in trying to keep the budget flat, is essentially going to start restricting health care services in certain areas of the province? I think that's worth knowing.

There are a number of other changes in this bill as well. Some of them having to do with the Employment Standards Code have to do with restricting the definition of "employee." That doesn't, for instance, sound particularly interesting on its own, but that defines who can and can't access services. Actually, it's a pretty big deal because it means that something could happen to you that's contrary to the Employment Standards Code, and because you're an excluded person, it doesn't matter. It takes a group of people and potentially excludes them from access to certain rights. I think that that is a big concern.

I have many more, but I'm sure I'll get another opportunity at a later point.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Government House Leader has risen.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to rise on 29(2)(a). To the hon. member, in regards to her referral moment – referral motion, I should say – I'll have more to say about this amendment shortly when I rise to speak on it.

But on 29(2)(a) I'd like to ask the hon. member a couple questions. She referred often in her remarks to when she was a cabinet minister, the Minister of Justice, in the province of Alberta just a few short months ago, when her party was in power. In comparing it to things within Bill 21 here and then to the context of why, she was explaining why she wanted to move a referral amendment in the House today, Mr. Speaker.

9:30

I do notice that she kind of glossed over the fact that what that would really mean is that she would be sending this important piece of legislation off to committee so that it could not pass this Chamber, Mr. Speaker, in the next several days, which ultimately would stop many of the budget implementation measures that the hon. the Finance minister is putting in place in large part to fix the mess that that hon. member and her colleagues made of this province when they were in government.

Now, I often moved referral amendments when I was in opposition, Mr. Speaker, as you know. Often I would tell a story about my horse Tank when I would move referral amendments. The hon. members that were in government back then are aware of it. Mr. Speaker, I know that you, as my benchmate, side by side a lot, would listen to my Tank stories. I would often tell a story about Tank. He knows when you're in the house. I don't know what it is with him, but he just knows that you're in the house, and he's got this thing for grain. First of all, my horse is a big horse. I mean, look. His name is Tank, and he likes his grain, and he likes oats, and he likes to do his thing. When you get in the house, he'll sometimes pick up his oat bin, and he likes to shake his head with the oat bin. I don't know. He seems to think that's magically going to make you leave the house to come out and give him oats. He gets so excited that he sometimes gets himself stuck in the corner of the corral in the fence and he scrapes himself up trying to get you to come outside and do it. You have to go out there finally, because he's cornered himself, and say: "Whoa, Tank. Whoa." Often I would say that when we wanted to refer a piece of legislation to committee. I'd say that we have to go: whoa.

But in this case, Mr. Speaker, I think another Tank story is more appropriate. [interjection] I don't know if the hon. member is laughing because my horse is named Tank. That's a good name for a horse. I'm proud of Tank, and you can come by the office after we rise today and see a picture of old Tank. But when you're crossing the river, when you're out for a ride with Tank, sometimes he's got this habit of just pausing in the middle of the river, and your boots start to fill up with water, and the saddlebags start to fill up with water, and it just becomes a mess, and that's one of those moments when you don't want Tank to go "Whoa." You want him to hurry up and get across that river because you're getting wet and you're taking on water.

The fact is that we have inherited a province that is taking on water because the NDP have been taking on so much debt, have messed up our system so badly, causing so many negative consequences to the people of Alberta, Mr. Speaker. This is not the time for them to send an important piece of legislation, to go "Whoa," and send it off to a policy committee to not actually pass this Chamber. This is a time to get across that river and stop taking on water. This government promised that we would stop taking on NDP water and, instead, we would get to work for Albertans balancing the budget.

So of course not. We're not going to support the hon. member's amendment. She wants to continue doing what, Mr. Speaker? Taking us down the road of record-breaking debt, record-breaking unemployment, devastating the people of this province, which is her legacy as a member of the former NDP government, probably the worst government. I certainly believe it was the worst government in the history of this province, the only one-term government in the history of this province, who want to come and spend their time trying to stop budget implementation bills that could begin to fix the mess that they created for Albertans. Not a mess that we created; a mess that they created, and they still haven't apologized to the people of Alberta. This is not the moment to go

"Whoa," and continue with the NDP policies. This is the moment to get across the river, stop taking on water, and start fixing the problem that is before this province.

That hon. member should explain why she wants to continue the path of devastating the people of the province, Albertans. It's shocking. I think that she should rise with the time that she has left and explain her behaviour.

The Speaker: I was struggling to see the relevance of the Tank story, but I'm glad that you got it back there in your very brief question or comment.

Are there others wishing to join in the debate this evening? The hon. the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise in support of this amendment. It of course comes as no shock to me to hear the Government House Leader say that he won't support this amendment, although I suspect that it's not because of the reasons he stated. He knows full well, just like every member on the government side does, that the deficit that they're projecting is \$2 billion higher than ours was and that the debt is the same as it would've been under us. So to say that they're fixing the mess is flat-out wrong. What they are doing is shifting the benefits of the public services from the people who need it the most to the people who need it the least, with their \$4.7 billion corporate handout that is going to be paid for off the backs of AISH recipients, children in care, and students.

Of course, I'm not surprised that they don't want to talk about these things at committee because none of these things are things that they ran on in their election platform, so they just want to make sure that this bill gets passed as quickly – here we are at 9:30 at night, when nobody is paying attention. If they could shut the lights off and conduct the session in the dark so that nobody else knew what was going on, I'm sure they would, Mr. Speaker, because they didn't run on any of the elements that are contained in this legislation.

There's much to talk about, but I do want to focus my limited time on the issue of tuition increases and why I think that this bill needs to be sent to committee just to study the aspect of tuition increases that are contained in this legislation.

I will say flat out that I believe that education is a right. I think that education, especially higher education, is key to providing Albertans not just skills for jobs, which I recognize is important, but the knowledge and critical thinking skills that people need to live a full life and to engage in the public life of our province. Because of those reasons, I think that every Albertan should be able to go to the postsecondary institution of their choice, and they shouldn't face any kind of barrier, much less the kind of financial barriers that this government is intent on putting up in front of students.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we've gone through a number of periods of history in the province of Alberta where we've built and expanded upon what is probably the best university and college sector in the entire country and alternating with periods of significant damage to that sector. When Alberta was first created as a province, one of the first acts of this Legislature was to create the University of Alberta in 1906. Alberta was an incredibly small province populationwise at that time, a few hundred thousand people at the most, but they recognized even in 1906 that the future of Alberta relied on having a vibrant and dynamic postsecondary sector, that Alberta couldn't forge a future for itself without high-quality higher education in this province.

That's why one of the first acts of this Legislature was to create the University of Alberta. That was followed shortly thereafter by the creation of a number of agricultural colleges. Of course, you,

Mr. Speaker, are well aware of Olds College, that was founded in 1913, along with Lakeland College, Fairview College. These were important institutes of higher learning, dedicated to the advancement of agriculture, which was at the time the most important sector of the economy in Alberta. That's because we recognized that we couldn't just leave things the way they were, that we needed to continue to train people in how to do their work in agriculture better. We needed to conduct the research to improve agricultural techniques, develop new crops, develop new livestock, develop value-added products. From the very beginning of Alberta's history we recognized that a successful postsecondary sector was the key to Alberta's future.

Now, after the founding of the province we went through a significant period of stagnation in the postsecondary sector, but in the late '50s and '60s the Social Credit government at the time went through a tremendous expansion of the postsecondary sector. In fact, most of the universities and colleges that we know today were founded in that time: the University of Calgary, the University of Lethbridge, Lethbridge College, Medicine Hat College, Portage College, Athabasca University, Grande Prairie Regional College, NAIT, Red Deer College, and on and on, Mr. Speaker.

9:40

All of those institutions were founded in the late '50s and during the '60s and early '70s under the Social Credit government because even they had the foresight to recognize that the tremendous resource wealth that Alberta was benefiting from at the time wasn't going to last forever and that the key to making sure that Alberta was sustainably successful in the future was to invest in its people. That's why they expanded the postsecondary sector so significantly, so that it wasn't just people who lived close to Edmonton who could get a postsecondary education. They had a vision for providing postsecondary education to every citizen of the province regardless of where they lived. I think that the creation of those institutions went a long way to bringing higher education to the people of the province, people in every corner of the province, and I am grateful for the contributions that that government made to the higher education sector.

Now, that was followed by some years of treading water under Peter Lougheed and Don Getty, and then Ralph Klein and his Finance minister, Jim Dinning, took the axe to the postsecondary sector. They cut the budgets by almost 30 per cent in the early '90s. In fact, I had the opportunity on a number of occasions to meet Jim Dinning at University of Calgary functions, and he told me that that was always the first place that Conservative governments looked for cuts, the postsecondary sector. In my time as Minister of Advanced Education I used that as a warning to everybody in the postsecondary sector that I talked to. I said that should the UCP get elected, the first sector that they will look at for cuts is the university and college sector. Of course, unfortunately, I was right.

Jim Dinning wasn't the only Tory who took the axe to the postsecondary sector. Of course, Thomas Lukaszuk was Advanced Education minister, and he cut the budgets by 7 per cent under his watch. Then Jim Prentice's final budget, the last budget that he brought forward, projected 5 per cent reductions in grants to universities and colleges every year. Now, we all remember what happened to the Prentice government when they brought that budget forward. They were soundly rejected by the people of Alberta, and I think it was in no small part because he did what this government is doing, shifting the costs of services onto the backs of the people who can least afford it while refusing to make those who have the ability to pay for public services pay for them.

Now, he didn't go as far as this government does. He left corporate taxes flat. He left those untouched, which was incredibly

unpopular. This government, of course, is reducing corporate taxes all the way to 8 per cent, which is a huge mistake. Unless you're a corporate CEO or a shareholder, you end up paying more and getting less from this budget.

Now, under our watch the university and college sector went through significant growth and improvement. We brought stability to the system after a long period of instability. We increased funding to each institution by 2 per cent a year over four years. We brought in a tuition freeze. We brought in a fees freeze, which was really important because, as members opposite have said, the tuition alone in Alberta, in the province, wasn't the most expensive, but the combination of tuition and fees at universities and colleges in Alberta was the most expensive. Even though the old Tories pretended to regulate tuition, they created these massive loopholes that allowed universities to charge fees and market modifiers for programs that drove up the cost of higher education in this province to the point where it was the most expensive in the country.

On top of freezing tuition fees and freezing additional fees, we provided student mental health funding. We provided funding for up to 3,000 tech seats. We provided new scholarships for indigenous students, and I want to address a remark that the Member for Calgary-Lougheed made during question period today. He said that indigenous students would be able to get free tuition from their bands, which is flat-out false. He should know as a former member of the federal government that not every indigenous student is entitled to postsecondary education. Each band is given an allotment, and once that allotment is gone, potential postsecondary students who would be eligible but can't get the money are left in the cold. I sincerely hope that he apologizes for spreading this mistruth that every indigenous student is entitled to free higher education in this country because that's not true.

We also created for the first time in many decades new universities in the province of Alberta. We changed the Alberta College of Art and Design to the Alberta University of the Arts, and we also put Red Deer College and Grande Prairie Regional College on the path to becoming universities, which is important for improving access to a university education in Alberta. All Albertans in all parts of the province have the right to a higher education, but the fact is that the farther you have to go to receive that education, the less likely you are to do so. That's why it was important to us as a government to put Red Deer College and Grande Prairie Regional College on the path to becoming universities, so that potential university students in central Alberta and northwestern Alberta had the same opportunities that students near Edmonton and Calgary and Lethbridge had to get a university degree if they chose to do that.

Now, the issue of access, that I've mentioned, is a significant one. During the estimates debate the Member for Calgary-Bow expressed his concern about the low participation rates in postsecondary education here in the province of Alberta, and that's a concern that I share. He continued to point to the MacKinnon report, which insisted on making comparisons of our postsecondary sector to the postsecondary sectors in British Columbia, Ontario, and Quebec. It's important to note that if we had the same participation rates in postsecondary education in Alberta as the province of B.C. enjoys, we'd need room for 80,000 more students. That's 50 per cent more students than are currently enrolled in the university and college sector in Alberta right now. How on earth this government thinks that they're going to be able to increase access to postsecondary education by cutting the budgets, cutting the grants to universities and colleges by approximately 5 per cent this year and increasing amounts over the next three or four years boggles the mind. We need to create spaces and hire staff and faculty to teach 80,000 more students to meet the Member for

Calgary-Bow's own stated goal to have postsecondary participation rates the same as British Columbia's, but we can't get there with the budget that this government is bringing forward.

That's why I think it's important that we send this bill to committee to look at this issue of access and look at what this government is proposing with tuition in combination with what they've proposed in the budget, in combination with all of the other things that they've done to students to make postsecondary education less accessible to them. Not only are they raising tuition, not only are they cutting the budgets that will lead to scrapping programs, firing hundreds of staff and faculty all across the province – they scrapped the STEP program; they're scrapping tuition and education tax credits; they're raising student loan interest rates; they're cutting wages for public-sector workers so that many of the students who graduate from university or college and go on to work for the public sector will have less of an ability to pay off student loans that will be bigger and more expensive. On top of all of that, they're doing nothing to create jobs in the private sector.

I was flipping through the debate in *Hansard* when we brought in the tuition cap, Mr. Speaker, and I certainly hope that I can provide some additional comments under 29(2)(a).

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika has risen.

9:50

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Don't hold your breath, hon. member.

I appreciate this opportunity to rise under 29(2)(a). I wanted to just kind of address some of the things that have been said tonight in the Chamber, particularly by the members for Edmonton-Gold Bar and Calgary-Buffalo. Now, when we hear the language used by the NDP in this Chamber, I think it's actually a bit dangerous. It's dangerous because while they might be posturing or trying to put on a bit of a show, the people who watch their clips on their social media or Twitter or whatever don't know that. They contact MLA offices in an outrage with all this misinformation about what this government is actually trying to do. The reality is that it's trying to make things better.

Now, the Member for Calgary-Buffalo has said that, you know, their government was trying to do what was good for the kids, for the children. To suggest that we're not is just blatantly outrageous. We have to make some difficult decisions as this government, and I would like to look at things with a glass-half-full kind of attitude. An example is the Member for Calgary-Mountain View. We may disagree on a number of policy issues, but I can tell by the emotion that she has when she talks about members in the gallery that come to visit that she genuinely cares about her constituents. She genuinely cares about this province, and I admire that. I do. The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has been pegged, I mean, multiple times as having a very crusty exterior, but as a geologist I'm certain that he cares genuinely about the environment. I don't doubt that.

But I also care about the future of this province and leaving something better for my kids, Mr. Speaker. I don't want them to come to me in 20 years and say: "Dad, why didn't you do something when you had the chance? Why did you saddle me with all this debt? Why did you make it so unaffordable in this province now because of the massive debt load you left upon us as kids?" The members opposite can go ahead and try to package this however they want, but the reality is that the bill of goods that they're selling is a crock of crap. I apologize. I withdraw that remark.

If I may continue, you know, when I was younger – I think I was probably 10 or 11 – I wanted to get a Christmas present for my

brother. I didn't have any money, so what I did was that I took a textbook, a math textbook, and cut out the middle. Don't worry; it was discovery math. I cut out the middle and put this note inside and closed it and wrapped it up. He opened it up on Christmas Day, and he thought it was going to be this nice gift. He sees that it's a textbook. Then he opens it up and finds a note, and it was me just calling him a dummy. I mean, honestly, you can package anything as much as you want, make it look really nice, but no matter how nice you make that package look, it's still just a crock if there's nothing really of substance inside. That's the bill of goods the members opposite are selling.

They're trying to tell Albertans that in some convoluted way we're trying to destroy this province and we're trying to take from the most vulnerable. The reality, Mr. Speaker, is that right now Alberta is quite vulnerable. We are in a very precarious state in this province. We are careening down the tracks towards a hundred billion dollars of debt. Based on the way that the members opposite do accounting, I suspect that number is a lot higher, but we'll go with the hundred billion because, well, they're sure stuck on this \$4.7 billion, which is interesting as well. I'd be curious to see one of the members opposite actually break that number down instead of just using it as a talking point. I mean, really, like, the term has been thrown around in this Chamber a lot lately, that math is hard. Well, I'll leave that to them, especially to the worst Finance minister in the history of this province.

There are a couple of important numbers that I wanted to mention to him before my time expires. He talked about why the NDP got elected. There are a couple of things. My time is expiring, and I will sit down.

The Speaker: Hon. members, anyone else wishing to join in the debate? I do recognize that there's a government member who's risen to speak, and we have heard from a number of opposition members in succession, so I think it's reasonable that the government has the opportunity to join debate.

I would just caution the hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika that the use of words like "crock" and the other word that you've apologized for certainly is likely to create disorder and they are unparliamentary. So I encourage you in the time that you have before you to use appropriate parliamentary language.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I apologize for not sitting down while you were standing. I kind of got caught up in the moment there for a second. I will be mindful of my language. As passionate as I get, I don't mean to create disorder. I just get passionate about the issues.

I just want to continue along. There are a couple of numbers I wanted to mention because the Member for Calgary-Buffalo had said why the NDP got elected. Well, one important number here is 28. Twenty-eight seats in this Legislature in the previous government went to the NDP caucus as a result of vote splitting. To suggest that simply because there was an unpopular budget or an unpopular government prior, which I don't necessarily disagree with – there were some things that Albertans were upset with and they had a right to be so. There were 28 seats, Mr. Speaker, where the vote total between the Wildrose and the PC would have been more than enough to fill that seat for a Conservative member of this Chamber, not an NDP member. So the Member for Calgary-Buffalo should recognize that. That's an easy number.

Another one is 100, \$100 billion. Now, I did already mention this a little bit, but I need to reinforce this point, that I think that number is actually low. Now, I'm going to stick with it, but \$100 billion is where we are going, and they want to sit there and say: "Oh, you know, your debt is going to be 90-plus billion dollars. Really,

what's the difference?" You're still talking about \$6 billion or \$7 billion in difference. Now, if that doesn't matter to you, I don't know what does. You're just throwing around numbers like you don't care. Like, that's crazy talk. I mean, seriously, it's like I'm taking crazy pills here. So I think about that number. I think: oh, my goodness. Like, you know, the difference of \$6 billion, \$7 billion, as if it's nothing. It's significant.

Six, a really important number here. The number six. Six credit downgrades, Mr. Speaker. Six credit downgrades by the worst Finance minister in the history of this province. Now, again, that number gets thrown around a couple of times. It may have lost its lustre. But think about that for a second. Think about how bad your credit goes in four years with six credit downgrades. Try borrowing money from your neighbour to start a lemonade stand after six credit downgrades in their credit book. They're not going to give you a dime. They probably wouldn't even let you have the dime that fell on the ground in front of their house because your credit is so bad.

Now, what about another number: two. Two billion dollars in interest payments to bankers and bondholders in foreign countries. Now, let's think about how many teachers, how many nurses, how many doctors, how many schools could be built with that interest money alone. The majority of that interest was piled on by the members opposite.

They sit here and they tell us how much we don't care about public-sector workers, which, again, I believe is, in itself, offensive. You know, I've used unparliamentary language today, and I do apologize, but that is offensive; that creates disorder. I'll tell you why. Saying that we don't care about the front-line workers while you pile on debt and increase the amount of money we pay every year in interest payments that could be going to these front-line services: that's offensive. That's offensive, right?

There are a couple of other simple numbers here: 63 members of the government caucus. It's an important number to recognize, you know, that we were voted in in April primarily because people were sick and tired of not having a government that listened.

10:00

I can tell you right now that I have constituents telling me all the time how responsive this government has been. The Minister of Environment and Parks: some people, you know, have seen him so many times, and they're just shocked that they couldn't even schedule a meeting with the Member for Lethbridge-West. I don't know if she was too busy or just overly dismissive of what mattered to people at the time; that's for that member to explain. But that's the kind of mentality that this government is taking, to be responsive to the constituents who hired us, because, make no mistake, Mr. Speaker, we work for them, right? They pay our salaries. We don't forget that. This budget, these bills: they're all the commitments that we made, that we're fulfilling to them.

Now, another number that's really important, that relates a bit back to what I just said, is 1,040,004. Now, if anyone from the opposition side wants to chime in as to what that number means, I'd be happy to hear you. You were very vocal during question period. I don't hear a pin drop over there now. That's the number of votes for the UCP in April, a historic number, Mr. Speaker. Like, think about what that is. That many people were so disenfranchised by the previous government that they came out in droves both in the advance polls and on general election day because they demanded change. Some people go out and they vote, you know, for years, they just kind of cast their ballot. It's their civic right. I bet people voted so hard that they ripped right through that paper for that Conservative candidate. I had people come up and tell me they couldn't wait to vote. They were lining up to vote in advance polls

just to be able to say to all their friends, to brag as a point: I voted to get rid of the NDP. Holy smokes. One million plus people sure did that. If we can do the math on that, that's 58.88 per cent of the vote. That's a pretty big number. I will say so myself.

You know, I'm done railing on the members opposite, but, again, I sit here and I listen to what they have to say. Again, I do believe they genuinely care, but they need to be careful as to what they say because while the language they use may be parliamentary and permissible in this Chamber, it creates disorder in the public, and that disorder leads to misinformation being spread across Alberta, and that's completely unacceptable. That's not the job that they were hired to do. We were hired to come in this Chamber and raise the level of debate to the highest level in this province, increase decorum.

If you'll notice, Mr. Speaker, during question period, as I'm sure you do, on this side of the House we allow the members opposite to ask their questions. [interjections] Well, let me rephrase. I'll rephrase that. But I'm sure you're going to clip this and put it on Twitter because Twitter is so cool. It is their right to ask the questions, and it's our job to take those questions. But I will say this. We don't heckle – we don't heckle – because it's their job to represent their constituents, and it's our job to answer the questions, the ministers' jobs. We don't heckle, right? We don't do that. We're raising the level of decorum. I guess I'm just trying to get the point across that Albertans have spoken loud and clear with their votes on what they want from this government. They have been very clear on what they didn't want.

I'm hoping that they're taking some lessons from that because what you see before you is another piece of legislation that is fulfilling campaign commitments to get the province back on track, to put our fiscal house in order.

I look at my three kids, and while they're young and they don't know what I do really for a living, really what politics is in general, there will come a time when they will. There will come a time when they will talk to me about what I do. They'll want to know what I do, and I want to be able to proudly look them in the face and tell them that I am doing what's best for this province and what's best for their future because that's what matters.

You know, I would feel terrible if I had to look my kids in the eyes in 20 years and tell them: "Sorry. I had an opportunity, and I blew it. I blew it because, you know, I was afraid. I was afraid of what the members opposite would say. I was afraid of what the Twitter trolls would say." I don't even have Twitter. You know, I don't have time for that. But I will say this, Mr. Speaker. I do have time for my constituents, I have time for debate in this Chamber, and I have time for feedback from the members opposite because I really, truly value input from different perspectives. But what I don't value is the kind of language used there to create disorder within the public.

Mr. Speaker, before I close, I do want to qualify one thing. The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar did mention Thomas Lukaszuk in relation to us. He's not one of ours. I just want to get that one on the record. No one on this side spent \$15,000 on a cellphone bill, but I digress.

I will say this. I am proud, Mr. Speaker, I am so proud to stand on this side of the House and help to fulfill the mandate of this government, to speak in favour of these bills, to stand with each and every one of the members on this side of the House because I know that their hearts are in the right place, just like the hearts on the other side. They are. I disagree with them politically, but they're in the right place. I will say that it brings me such great pride to know that when the time comes and I sit down with my kids, I can tell them that I did everything I could for them.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has risen.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise and respond to some of the remarks that the Member for Cardston-Siksika had to share with the Chamber. First of all, I want to take issue with his characterization of me as somebody with a crusty exterior. I don't think there's anybody in this House that would agree with the member when he says that. But should there be anybody who says that I have a crusty exterior, I would say that, you know, I'm like a croissant; perhaps crusty on the outside but soft and . . .

Ms Hoffman: Flaky.

Mr. Schmidt: . . . yeah, flaky. I'm flaky. With friends like that, who needs enemies? Thank you, Edmonton-Glenora. I have completely lost track. Mr. Speaker, can I raise a point of order or something?

You know, I do want to respond to some of the things that the Member for Cardston-Siksika did have to say, not about my personality but about our characterization of the budget and his response to what his children will say to him 20 years down the road. It's instructive to me, I think, to share with him that – you know, I think it's widely agreed that perhaps, in retrospect, what the Klein government did to the budget of Alberta in '93 and '94, those early years, was probably a bit too drastic. I certainly spoke to a lot of people, a lot of people who worked in both the public and the private sector, who recognize in hindsight that the Klein budget cuts of the '90s were far too extreme, and that if they could turn back time and do things differently, they would probably choose to administer the finances of the province of Alberta differently.

I suspect that 20 years from now the member opposite along with all of his government colleagues will probably think the same way because, certainly, they are in fact taking money from the most vulnerable Albertans and giving it to the people who need it the least. It might take them a few years to realize that, but I'm certain that with 20 years of hindsight they will look back on this budget and the other fiscal measures that they've brought in and realize that it did very little to benefit their own children, to benefit my children, to benefit most of the children in the province while doing a lot to benefit the Hong Kong billionaire who owns Husky, the projects in Wisconsin and Newfoundland that Husky is using our taxes to finance.

10:10

You know, I hope that the members opposite look back on the lessons that Alberta learned going through the Klein budget era and realize that that was going too far. I think the Member for Calgary-Lougheed admitted as much when he spoke to the AUMA in September. He did recognize that those budgets affected municipalities very harshly and said that this budget wasn't going to be as bad as the ones in the early '90s. I don't know what the actual numbers turn out to be, but I know that the AUMA folks are severely disappointed.

I think that the members opposite like to talk about the million Albertans who voted in favour of them in April, and I can't help but wonder how many of those million are disappointed with what this government has done to the province so far. As we know, the economy is no stronger and, in fact, it's weaker now than it was on election day, in April. Jobs aren't coming back. I hope that the members opposite take this opportunity to make their children look fondly on them in the future.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: We are back on REF1, the amendment. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has risen.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the members for what I would say is quite an enjoyable debate this evening, including the little bit of banter. I want to assure all my colleagues and you, Mr. Speaker, and all Albertans that I in no way meant to disparage my hon. colleague the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. I think that he has been a very strong advocate for the people he represents, and I think he's a fine man. I want to be on record saying that.

I also want to say that when I read some of the remarks from past debate and I hear some of the remarks that are being made here tonight, it's hard for me to make sense of how one person can say one thing not even a year ago and then say something that seems quite contrary a year later. I'm going to start with the remarks from the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, also known as the Government House Leader, who less than a year ago said:

I rise today to speak in support of Bill 26. I'm glad to see a piece of legislation of this kind here in the Assembly. I actually think it should have been here a long time ago, quite frankly . . . I, like other members in this Chamber, have heard from many people who are AISH recipients, heard about how tough it is to currently live under the current numbers. We've heard from AISH recipients who cannot afford basic necessities, as the hon. member just described, I mean, basic hygiene necessities.

He goes on, Mr. Speaker, to say how difficult it is for people to live on AISH at the level it was. Then here just a few months later we hear the same hon. member equating freezing AISH compensation with something that is being done to prevent taking on water.

When I hear these comments – and I hear the humanity in the comments less than a year ago. I hear the humanity around people living on such a fixed, limited income not being able to afford things like shampoo and how nobody should be in a position in a developed society such as ours, such a rich society and such a rich province, where we think it's okay for people who don't have the ability to work a job for income to live in those kinds of conditions. When I hear, earlier in question period, exchanges about, "Well, this is being done because we just pay people too much here who are severely handicapped" and then I read the comments from members who are now sitting in cabinet making those decisions to fail to increase payments for somebody who is living in these conditions, I find it very troubling. I think that I agree with the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre a year ago – a year ago – when he said: you know, we should have done this sooner.

Here we have a government caucus in this place tonight with the ability to at least stop this bad thing from happening. I will say that in my experience and in my conversations with Albertans, things like having a tuition rate cap, things like ensuring that your interest payments don't go up – we spend a lot of time talking about interest payments of government, and I want to remind everyone that in this bill we are making decisions about interest payments for students who have recently graduated who are on their path to repaying their student loans. Why are we okay with putting this burden and downloading this burden onto Alberta students, recent graduates who are doing their best to get a good start in life? We already know that there are 27,000 fewer jobs than there were when they were in school a year ago, on election day, in fact: 27,000 fewer jobs now. They have fewer jobs, and we're going to be asking them to pay more in their student loan payments.

I think taking a pause, saying to Tank or whatever analogy you want to use: "You know what? Let's pause. Let's go to a committee,

a committee that's still two-thirds government members" – it's not like we're sending this to somewhere where we think it's going to wither and die; we're sending this to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities. I'll tell you that I know there are many competent members on this committee. There are 15 members total, chaired by the Member for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche. I think that this committee has the potential to look at the implications of this bill.

Something that members in opposition used to say a lot that I found a little patronizing, so I don't mean it in that way, was: you know, you should have considered the unintended consequences; you should have considered the unintended consequences of your decisions.

What I have to say is that when we look at goals that are being set for increasing postsecondary participation in one sentence and than very shortly thereafter we see, "Well, we're going to eliminate the tuition rate cap, we're going to eliminate the tax credit, we're going to eliminate the summer temporary employment program, and we're going to increase loan repayment rates" – I'll tell you that when I knocked on the doors of Edmonton-Glenora, when I talked to folks in the community, low- and middle-income families are some of the least likely to be willing to take on debt, period. It's low- and middle-income families that need to be able to access student loans more than anyone else. So saying to them, "Okay, you're already less likely to participate in postsecondary, and now we're going to increase your rate of interest payments": it really does download a lot onto those families and those individuals.

I think our students in this province deserve an opportunity to attend a postsecondary of their choice. I think the Member for Cardston-Siksika and his children – I imagine he wants them to have the opportunity to go to a postsecondary institution one day, one of their choosing. I would hope that they'd feel confident choosing one in Alberta and know that their government isn't going to increase their tuition significantly, is going to ensure that they invest in the faculty that are there, and that they have an opportunity to pursue a variety of careers here in the province of Alberta.

I fear that one of the consequences, whether it's intended or not – maybe it is – of this legislation that we're asking the government to take a pause on and consider referring to committee, because committee can have an opportunity to look through it and grapple with some of these decisions, will be dismissed. I think that that's problematic.

In terms of Community and Social Services and seniors that have been mentioned, some of my colleagues have talked about AISH, and I, too, agree. Some of my colleagues who were members of different caucuses not too long ago said that they thought it was really important that AISH be indexed and that folks who have such a meagre means of income have the opportunity to have just a little bit extra in their pockets to go from month to month.

In terms of employment and income support benefits, again, this isn't something that people are really keen to apply for. They aren't really keen to put their hands up and say: "You know what? I need income support." But when they do, they deserve to have a government funding at a rate for today, not a rate for years ago. Again, failing to index this fails to acknowledge the reality. The reality that we have: the Conference Board of Canada, 2 per cent inflation this year; in education, which is where I've spent a lot of my focus as of late, 2.2 per cent enrolment growth. Anything that doesn't see 4.2 per cent growth in education would definitely be a cut.

10:20

But it goes even deeper than that. We also have the seniors' benefit. This is something that a lot of Alberta seniors rely on to

help them get from month to month on things like – at McQueen lodge in the beautiful riding of Edmonton-Glenora there's a tuck shop. The tuck shop is open a couple of days a week. You can go down, and you can buy a word search. You can buy a stuffed animal for your kid or grandkid or whatever it might be. Having a few dollars in your pocket to be able to buy something from the volunteer-run tuck shop might not seem important to members of this House, but I can tell you that to my constituents it is deeply important as well as the seniors' lodge program.

In terms of eliminating the regulated rate cap, this is something that – I know there is a bit of an ideological bent, but I would have thought that making electricity prices more affordable, not less, would be a priority for all members of this House.

I've already spoken in a previous opportunity to some of the changes to physicians, so I probably won't go on about that right now.

In terms of Municipal Affairs, Justice and Solicitor General: enables provincial government to retain a greater portion of fines collected on behalf of municipalities. Wow. We already put it on the municipalities to collect these fines, and then we're going to ask that this money not be rightfully given back to those municipalities for infractions that are happening in their communities. This has the potential to be significantly devastating to our policing budgets and to those particularly in the two large centres.

Of course, enabling legislation where the minister has the ability to change the police costing model or change currently exempted municipalities: again, I know that there was a platform and I know that people were elected, but I can tell you that this was not in the platform. This was not in the literature that showed up at my house or any of the houses in any of your ridings. This wasn't something that you advertised you were going to do, so I think that, at a minimum, taking the time to consider the implications before rushing through would be fair and responsible.

In terms of labour, giving the minister greater authority to define an employee, setting restrictions on unionized employees for what services they access from government, repealing essential services and the worker replacement ban, reinstating specific bargaining unit exemptions, and prescribing limits on termination and severance paid to nonbargaining unit employees: these are things that, again, were not in the platform.

Here we are, only on Bill 21 of a new government and its first cycle through spring and fall session, and there's an opportunity to implement the platform. Instead, what's being implemented are a bunch of what I would say are really nasty cuts, nasty cuts that are going to really deeply hurt some of those who are most vulnerable in our society.

The Member for Cardston-Siksika asked about the \$4.7 billion no-jobs corporate handout, as I like to refer to it. It's on page 144 of the fiscal plan. I remember that because it's 12 squared. I like numbers, too, so for anyone who forgets: page 144 of the fiscal plan. We were saying originally \$4.5 billion because when we did the math, we estimated that it would be \$4.5 billion. But when the fiscal plan came out, we read the documents, we did the analysis, and we saw that it was right there in black and white, \$4.7 billion. That is, again, around the corporate tax reduction.

As was mentioned by one of my colleagues, the Member for Edmonton-West Henday, the announcement was made about this \$4.7 billion giveaway in the EnCana building. Of course, now we have the devastating news for so many families and so many people who've relied on EnCana for their livelihood for many, many years that they are leaving Canada. That is something that I think speaks to the fact that that \$4.7 billion giveaway was rushed into.

Now the government is asking us to rush into this Bill 21, a significant omnibus bill that attacks so many different areas within

a variety of budgets, and what we're doing as an opposition is saying, "Whoa, Nelly" or "Whoa, Tank" or Nabra or whatever metaphor you want to use to say that we need a little bit more time to have an opportunity to review this and consider the real implications of this. I think that all private members deserve that opportunity.

When members accuse us of sharing misinformation, we're actually not. We're reading the budget, we're asking questions in estimates, we're finding out what the implications are, so I think that it's fair for us to all have an opportunity to do that on a deeper level through this committee. I think that it's the responsible thing, and I think it's something that we owe to our constituents, whether they live in our ridings or not.

I often say: you know, I work for you, I work for the public, and that is my job. I think that for government to say out of one side of their mouth "We respect folks who are low income" and then out of the other side say "But we're taking away your meagre \$30 AISH increase this year to keep up with inflation because we are 'taking on water'" is not just disrespectful; I think it's actually inhumane. I think it's a really unfortunately way to speak to one another about things that our constituents rely on for meeting their basic human rights.

I think that saying, "You know, I know we said last year that we thought you should be able to afford toothpaste and shampoo and those kinds of things, but we got into government, and we decided that it was just so much more important for us to give \$4.7 billion to corporations; we've got to make that up somewhere, so you're going to have to do your part," while major employers have not created any jobs that the government had promised they would – this is not a discussion that I enter into lightly, nor is any bill, but this certainly has, I think, negative ramifications.

That's why I support the motion to refer to the exceptional committee on family and community services. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see that the hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat has risen.

Ms Glasgow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I mean, I love getting up on 29(2)(a), and I love having the opportunity to address this House. I think it's important, especially when we're talking about the Families and Communities Committee. I'm very happy to be able to be on that committee. It's a very productive committee. We do a lot of really important work. We've been overseeing estimates, just like the other standing committees of this House have.

One thing that's come up, over and over and over, is the job-creation tax cut and what it is or isn't. While the opposition likes to cite whatever page they do, if they go to page 64, it has a revenue comparison that actually shows what happens when you implement a job-creation tax cut, which is: create revenue, create jobs. When that happens, it offsets what it takes out of the economy. If they wish to look at a balance sheet, not like they really have in the past, they would see that there.

You know, what I can really tell you about is what happens in my constituency. In Brooks-Medicine Hat I hear all the time, time and time again, everywhere we go: you guys are doing a great job; keep up the good work. I mean, that's not to say that there isn't any criticism. Of course, there's criticism, and I think that's the best part of democracy, that there is criticism and we can hear it. Actually, it makes it better, makes us better. For me, I get to hear from the great people of Brooks-Medicine Hat. I mean, we have the opportunity through e-mail, through whatever else. Even in committee we had some people come into private members' public bills. It's been a great pleasure to hear from people about our plans and how that affects them.

I know that for the people in my riding the most important thing is jobs because in southern Alberta we've been devastated by the downturn in oil and gas prices. I mean, under the previous government there were 170,000, I think, jobs lost. That's concerning because I know that a large portion of that would be in my riding, anecdotally, of course. I talked to so many people. I talked to grown men who were crying on their doorsteps, and I know that the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat referenced this yesterday, too. It's really unfortunate when you see this. You see families devastated by a loss of income, and the members opposite get up and talk about – you know, they just basically squash any opportunity for those people to get back to work by grandstanding on a tax cut that actually will help our province. If they continued to read or if they read all of the fiscal plan instead of just one line, they might know that.

10:30

Of course, I'm responding to the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, so I will get back on topic. This shouldn't go back to committee, Mr. Speaker. This is a plan that's costed. This is a plan that has been endorsed by millions of Albertans, as the Member for Cardston-Siksika has said, and this is a plan that we believe in. It's a plan that Albertans believe in, which is why it should go forward. Any impediment to that, any thought of more time to drag this on – we need to get people back to work, and that's exactly what we're doing with our plan.

With that, I will resign my time. Hopefully, the Member for Edmonton-Glenora can explain to us why she seems to have read every single page of the fiscal plan except for page 64.

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

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for her questions. Again, page 144 of the fiscal plan is the page that I continue to refer to. I'm happy to answer that question about where the \$4.7 billion number is.

I'll also remind the member that cabinet ministers have said that it hasn't resulted in job creation and how much that disappoints them because it certainly isn't working. It also hasn't worked in that 27,000 fewer Albertans have jobs now than had jobs when they were elected. I agree that people absolutely voted for more jobs. They one hundred per cent voted for more jobs. Instead, what is being brought forward here in Bill 21 is a plan to cut payments for AISH recipients, to cut payments for seniors living in seniors' lodges, to cut payments for folks who are some of the most vulnerable and instead continue to increase costs for low- and middle-income families, including the increase to student loan repayment programs.

Again, I know that the member says: well, we ran on a platform. You absolutely did, and I can tell you that the increase to student loan debt repayments was not in the platform, Mr. Speaker, through you. It certainly is troubling to me. There absolutely was an election, and the majority of the seats were won by a party other than ours, but we were also elected as private members to come here and fight for Albertans.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are on the amendment. Are there any other members wishing to speak?

Seeing none, if there is a desire of the House to go to one-minute bells, then perhaps someone could move the request for unanimous consent.

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, I would like to move for unanimous consent to go to one-minute bells.

[Unanimous consent granted]

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment REF1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:34 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Ceci	Ganley	Phillips
Dach	Gray	Schmidt
Deol	Hoffman	Sigurdson, L.
Eggen		

Against the motion:

Aheer	Issik	Rehn
Amery	Kenney	Rowswell
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Lovely	Schow
Barnes	Luan	Schulz
Dreeshen	Madu	Schweitzer
Fir	Nally	Sigurdson, R.J.
Getson	Neudorf	Singh
Glasgo	Nixon, Jason	Stephan
Hanson	Orr	Walker
Horner	Panda	Wilson
Hunter		

Totals: For – 10 Against – 31

[Motion on amendment REF1 lost]

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are back on the bill. Is there anyone else wishing to join in the debate? I see the hon. Solicitor General has risen.

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, I'd move that we adjourn debate at this time.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Speaker: I see the hon. Solicitor General.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've made some good progress here tonight. I'd move that we adjourn the House until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

The Speaker: Tomorrow morning the Standing Committee on Families and Communities will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Community and Social Services in the Parkland Room, and the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future will consider the main estimates for the Ministry of Labour and Immigration in the Rocky Mountain Room.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:39 p.m.]

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