



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, November 25, 2019

Day 46

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature

First Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UCP), Speaker
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Milliken, Nicholas, Calgary-Currie (UCP), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UCP)
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Copping, Hon. Jason C., Calgary-Varsity (UCP)
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Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP)
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Savage, Hon. Sonya, Calgary-North West (UCP),
Deputy Government House Leader
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Schmidt, Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (NDP)
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Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UCP)
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UCP)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UCP)
Yaseen, Muhammad, Calgary-North (UCP)

Party standings:

United Conservative: 63

New Democrat: 24

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Turton
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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, November 25, 2019

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Hon. members, ladies and gentlemen, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by the Glendon school choir. I would invite you all to participate in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all of us command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's my pleasure. This morning I had the opportunity of meeting with the consul general of the Netherlands, Mr. Henk Snoeken. He's accompanied by the honorary consul general of the Netherlands in Edmonton, Jerry Bouma. It's particularly special having these gentlemen here this year as it is 75 years of freedom in the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Canada and Holland share a deep and meaningful bond stemming from the results of the Second World War, that continues to be a rewarding relationship all these decades later. Thank you for coming, and welcome to Alberta.

Also in the Speaker's gallery this afternoon a special guest: the Member of Parliament for Lethbridge, Ms Rachael Harder. She is accompanied by a number of constituents of hers and of the members of Lethbridge-West and Lethbridge-East. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, this afternoon, here for the School at the Legislature: from the constituency of St. Albert, students of Muriel Martin school.

Also, our anthem singers this afternoon, as I previously mentioned, guests of the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul: from Glendon school grades 2, 4, and 7, a range of students. A huge thank you to their teacher, Ms Amy Charter. Thanks for doing such an amazing job.

Also, guests of the MLA for Sherwood Park: Gunjan Mehta and Kashyap Pandit from the Hindu BAPS organization. Welcome.

Guests of the Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat: welcome the Newell Christian School all the way from Duchess today.

Last but not least, joining us and visiting the Official Opposition caucus are Wallis Kendal and Jasmine Nepoose.

Hon. members, please welcome our guests today.

Members' Statements

BAPS Charities

Mr. Walker: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize BAPS, which is a Hindu religious and social organization. It is a Gujarat, India based global spiritual organization that is dedicated to community service, peace, and harmony. As a world-wide Hindu organization BAPS actively engages in a number of endeavours aimed at spirituality, human development, and welfare. BAPS has more than 50,000 volunteers and 1,100 Hindu temples, with 100 centres right here in North America.

I have had the honour of attending BAPS events in Edmonton and Sherwood Park along with visiting the BAPS temple in Calgary. Most recently in Edmonton I along with the Minister of Municipal Affairs attended the BAPS Annakut Mahotsav event. Hindu community temples celebrate Annakut Mahotsav after the Diwali festival. The event had an exhibition stall that promoted the message of the Hindu Vedic literature: the world is one family, unity and tolerance. What an incredibly positive and inclusive message.

The inspiration behind the activities of BAPS in Edmonton is His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj and His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj. The Premier has had the opportunity to personally meet His Holiness and has a long-standing friendship with BAPS. The Minister of Infrastructure and the Minister of Community and Social Services have been to the BAPS temple in Calgary, too.

Mr. Speaker, BAPS is a great example of a faith-based civil society group that greatly contributes to Alberta through volunteerism, charity, spirituality, and social welfare supports. It is my sincere honour to recognize and salute BAPS in the Legislature today.

Thank you.

Campaign Investigations and Bill 22

Mr. Nielsen: Mr. Speaker, numerous members of this government's cabinet and caucus have been interviewed by the RCMP in their ongoing investigation into voter fraud and identity theft that appear to have plagued the UCP leadership race. The Minister of Justice, the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women, the Minister of Infrastructure, the Minister of Seniors and Housing, the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, also the Member for Cardston-Siksika and the Member for Sherwood Park were all interviewed by the RCMP as part of this scandal.

Let's keep in mind that the Premier tried to shrug this off as Twitter gossip at one point. But before the Justice minister turns his all-caps rant at me, let's make one thing clear: Albertans know that Twitter gossip doesn't result in over \$200,000 in fines. Albertans deserve a government that is up front with them. They deserve a government that doesn't try to hide from accountability or the rule of law, they deserve a government that doesn't fire those investigating them, and they deserve a government that takes their responsibilities under the Conflicts of Interest Act seriously. Just how many of the members I listed off earlier checked with the Ethics Commissioner before voting on Bill 22? My guess is none, Mr. Speaker.

I implore my colleagues on the other side of the House: take a stand. You know what this government is doing isn't right, and I

know that your constituents are telling you that, too. This is your chance. Listen to the people who elected you instead of the Premier's office. I hope you take it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Tax Policy

Mr. Guthrie: I'm not sure if you've heard, Mr. Speaker, but the NDP are claiming a \$4.7 billion corporate tax giveaway. The NDP claims: tax cuts don't work; the only way to help the economy is to continue increasing taxes. They say that they would balance the budget and would do so while ramping up their spend-and-tax policies. I am so looking forward to the NDP shadow budget that shows their path to balance in the next three years.

1:40

But let's talk numbers as we do have four years of NDP governance to look at for the effects of tax increases. First, we have the surprise-of-a-lifetime tax, called a \$1.4 billion carbon tax, that caused every Albertan to suffer; followed up with a 20 per cent increase in corporate taxes, increases to personal taxes, and a \$350 million increase to provincial property taxes. But it didn't stop there. They agreed to increasing CPP and WCB premiums. They packed on regulations and red tape which further reduced business competitiveness. As Alberta's only single-term government the NDP decimated the resource sector and drove capital investment out of the province in every sector by double-digit numbers. They shrunk the private sector and reduced our provincial earnings growth to the slowest in Canada by a country mile. Unemployment skyrocketed, vacancies grew, private-sector wages plummeted, and bankruptcies erupted.

The NDP claimed that they would gain \$6 billion in tax revenues, but all they did was realize an \$8.5 billion tax revenue shortfall, average over \$12 billion in debt each year they were in office, proving through their own doing that tax increases hurt all Albertans.

So, Mr. Speaker, it is our intention to reverse this catastrophic economic failure by the NDP. It will not be easy, and it will take time, but we will not be deterred.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Campaign Investigations and Bill 22

Ms Sweet: Mr. Speaker, Bill 22 has passed, and I'm sure this government has moved at record speed to fire the Election Commissioner and any trace of his investigation into the UCP leadership race. For those wanting justice, we hope and assume the RCMP investigation into UCP voter fraud soldiers on.

Let's be clear that Bill 22 is the most undemocratic and unethical act this Legislature has ever seen. Albertans won't forget, neither will this Official Opposition, and neither will I as the opposition critic for democracy and ethics. Albertans won't forget that these days just before the spring election the Member for Calgary-East had his business raided by RCMP officers in connection with the voter fraud investigation. Albertans also won't forget that the Member for Calgary-Glenmore was specifically named in a letter provided to the RCMP about the voter fraud that occurred. The letter detailed offshore e-mail servers and voting kiosks being run specifically to put the campaign by the current Premier over the top. Albertans also won't forget that despite being Members of this Legislative Assembly for seven months, neither of those members have come clean about what they know and whether they believe it's acceptable to remain as MLAs while under RCMP investigation. To both members: your silence is deafening.

The Premier, for his part, has dismissed all these allegations and called them Twitter gossip, but Bill 22 indicates that there is much, much more at play. And this Premier hopes that he can change the channel after his Texas hideout. I promise him this, that neither myself nor the 23 other MLAs on this side of the House will let Albertans forget what occurred last week, because it was shameful. Still, I believe in my heart that justice will be served someday.

Thank you.

The Speaker: I recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-North.

High School Construction in North Calgary

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to speak to declare my commitment to education in our province and investment in public infrastructure. Education is the most basic right for our children, and an educated Alberta is better for all of us. Our province is known for being innovative and entrepreneurial. That is because we value education and investment in our youth.

I want to express my excitement and appreciation regarding the recent announcement to build the north Calgary high school. For more than 15 years the families of Calgary-North have been advocating for a high school, and I am so pleased that our government has listened to their voices. In fact, Mr. Speaker, while I was door-knocking last spring, this was a high priority for parents in my constituency, among other things like jobs, economy, and pipelines. The new high school will have the capacity to serve about 1,800 students from north Calgary. A high school in Calgary-North was a growing need for the community and is well received by its residents. The announcement of a new high school shows Albertans that our government is committed to education. Having a high school closer, too, will increase a student's ability to participate in extracurricular activities and be more active in the community involvement. A new high school in Calgary-North will give students not only the opportunity to go to school closer to their home but also offer them excellent learning opportunities and better community participation.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I want to express my sincere thanks to the Northern Hills Community Association, who worked tirelessly for the past 15 years advocating for a high school, as well as all the residents of Calgary-North. Their commitment, hard work, and dedication paid off.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Climate Change

Ms Renaud: According to the UN's World Meteorological Organization the concentration of climate-heating greenhouse gases has hit a record high. The rising concentration of greenhouse gases follows inevitably from the continued surge in global emissions. We know that the world's scientists have calculated that emissions must fall by half by 2030 to give us a good chance at limiting heating to 1.5 degrees Celsius, beyond which hundreds of millions of people will suffer more heat waves, droughts, fires, floods, and extreme poverty.

Our planet is undergoing one of the largest changes in climate since dinosaurs went extinct. Although some of the changes our planet will undergo in the next few decades are already baked into the system, how different the climate looks at the end of the 21st century will depend largely on how humans respond now.

In April Environment and Climate Change Canada released Canada's Changing Climate Report, and the report states that Canada's north has started melting. It's projected that Canada

overall will warm almost twice the global average regardless of what we do to fight it.

UCP members like to point out other bad-actor countries when trying to deflect from their dismal action on climate change mitigation, energy efficiency, and climate leadership. Whataboutism will not solve the massive climate change challenges ahead of us. Swearing allegiance to one type of energy producer and plastering their signs on the people's House, our Legislature, will do nothing to address the massive challenges ahead of us. The only way that we as a province and country address the massive challenges and opportunities ahead of us is to unite behind the science and to act like our house is on fire.

Thank you.

Parliamentary Democracy

Ms Rosin: Mr. Speaker, I have a massive amount of respect for our democracy in this province, and part of my respect for our democracy, of course, includes its processes. That's why I'm always a little amazed when I witness members of this Assembly completely disrespect the institutions that make this province so great. Every time I enter this House, I'm overwhelmed and humbled by the opportunity I have been granted to represent Banff-Kananaskis and to make decisions that will hopefully make life a little bit better for Albertans, but it's becoming increasingly obvious that some enter this House and see it as an opportunity and a platform to spread fear and division instead of promoting constructive dialogue and cohesion.

I'm particularly unimpressed by the calls of the Official Opposition and their leader to pressure the Lieutenant Governor into behaving in a way that undermines our democracy and disregards the voices of Albertans. Last week the Leader of the Opposition demanded that the Lieutenant Governor block and barricade Bill 22 from becoming law. You see, Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to live in a province where we can't demand that democratic institutions be overturned just because we don't like them or personally agree with them. I'm proud that we can't bully our way around the processes or make unfounded demands of those involved in it.

For those on the other side of the aisle who feel like they can bend the process for their own agenda, do these members not remember what they themselves said about a man who attempted to petition the Lieutenant Governor in 2016? Twitter was overwhelmed by the hashtag #kudatah and the widespread mockery of the NDP, who lambasted the very idea that someone would petition the Lieutenant Governor. Yet here today it seems that that opposition has decided to take a page right from the playbook and make kudatah the official NDP policy.

Let me be clear, Mr. Speaker. I for one don't stand for this hypocrisy, nor do I stand for political moves that erode our democracy and undermine our institutions. The opposition can stomp their feet and bully and tweet all they want, but it won't change the outcome of this democracy.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona would like to address the House.

Member's Apology

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to address my comments from question period last Tuesday. Last week we witnessed an unprecedented attack on Alberta's democracy, namely the firing of the Election Commissioner while he was actively investigating members and associates of the government caucus.

During question period I used unparliamentary language to describe the Government House Leader's actions when he claimed that Bill 22 does not fire the Election Commissioner. In fact, the bill did specifically fire the Election Commissioner, and he has now been fired. In the face of the contradiction that appeared between the statement of the House leader and the words within the act, I used unparliamentary language when I said that the House leader was misleading the House.* While I retain my position that the House leader was incorrect when he suggested that Bill 22 did not fire anyone, I respect the rules and traditions of this Chamber, and as such, I withdraw my comment.

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

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Election Commissioner and Bill 22

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's good to be back, and I also offer a welcome back to the Premier. Bill 22, jammed through the Legislature while the Premier was in Texas, is an abuse of power that breaches the rule of law. The Premier fired the Election Commissioner in the midst of active investigations into him, members of his caucus, and members of his party. The House leader had the gall to tell this House, "No one is firing anybody," but the bill says that Mr. Gibson is "terminated." To the Premier: if you believe you did the right thing, will you at least correct the record and admit that as of today Lorne Gibson is no longer the Election Commissioner? Please tell the truth.

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the Leader of the Opposition knows full well, the position of Election Commissioner carries on within the office of the Chief Electoral Officer, which has been responsible for the administration and enforcement of Alberta election law from 1905 until July of 2018, analogous to the system that exists in every other province. As the Chief Electoral Officer said last Friday, "All investigations begun by the Office of the Election Commissioner will continue under Elections Alberta's statutory mandate." Nothing could be more clear than that.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier is wrong. The folks over there are not telling the truth, and they know it. There is no Election Commissioner right now, and this public firing has intimidated anybody tasked with holding this Premier accountable. The investigation has already been compromised. This is classic political interference, intimidation, and abuse of power. This is not, however, the classic behaviour of democratic leaders. The House leader said there was no panic, but they passed the bill with an urgency of someone on the run from the law. To the Premier: what are you hiding?

Mr. Kenney: Absolutely nothing, Mr. Speaker. In fact, Bill 22 received more hours of debate than any other bill before the Legislature in this fall session. Let me carry on quoting from the Chief Electoral Officer, who says:

Prior to July 2018, when the Office of the Election Commissioner was created, Elections Alberta was responsible for receiving complaints and conducting all investigations regarding non-compliance with the Election Act and the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act. Elections Alberta is once again tasked with performing this regulatory role. It will resume the

*See page 2328, right column, paragraph 4

role in accordance with its duty to act independently and to apply the election and election finance legislation consistently and fairly.

Ms Notley: Well, thanks to Bill 22, Mr. Speaker, there's no such thing as anybody having a duty to act independently. The Supreme Court of Canada defines the rule of law as "supreme over officials of the government . . . and thereby preclusive of the influence of arbitrary power." This Premier thinks he's above the law and that he can fire those who would hold him to account on a whim. Last week the Premier forced this House to serve as his tool for this abuse of power. What is so damaging that this Premier has to abuse his power, corrupt this House, and break the rule of law to keep it secret?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, all of that sounds like the campaign of fear and smear we heard in the spring election that Albertans rejected. Instead, I'll quote from an independent officer who has been independently administering Alberta elections law for several years, who was in fact appointed by the previous NDP government, when he said on Friday, "All investigations begun by the Office of the Election Commissioner will continue under Elections Alberta's statutory mandate." All that's changed is that instead of the commissioner being accountable to the Legislature or the government, the commissioner is now accountable to an independent, arm's-length official.

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

Ms Notley: What's changed, Mr. Speaker, is that the guy that has fined those guys over \$200,000 just got fired by those guys, but you know what? Let's go into quotes because it's not just me and some of the folks at the Grey Cup who were worried about this Premier. The *Star* says that Bill 22 "amounts to an abuse of power" and "an affront to democracy that will not be easily swept under the rug." The *Globe and Mail* says it "raises serious questions about democracy in Alberta." The *Edmonton Journal* says this commissioner should have been allowed to finish the job. To the Premier. Albertans don't believe you. Why won't you come clean with them?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, many commentators remarked on how the real violation of the democratic spirit came from the Leader of the Opposition when she wrote to Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor asking that she violate our Westminster parliamentary constitution by effectively vetoing a law duly passed by the elected representatives of Albertans. I know that the leader of the NDP has had a hard time coming to terms with Albertans firing her last spring, but here's the reality. Albertans' elected representatives passed this law to restore . . .

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, what I have a hard time coming to terms with is the attack on democracy by this Premier.

But let's keep going in terms of what other folks think. Graham Thomson calls it dangerous. Ryan Jespersen calls it disgraceful. Rick Bell says that it stinks. Jason Markusoff asks, "How the (expletive) does he think he can get away with this?" And Charles Adler says, quote, we've just witnessed goons laying a beating on democracy and then denying they did. Premier, are all of these people wrong, too?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I can tell you what's wrong: the opposition leader violating our Constitution by seeking to have the representative of the Queen refuse to pass into law a law duly

adopted by the elected representatives of the people of Alberta to strengthen the independence of the Election Commissioner so that he or she will in the future be accountable to the Chief Electoral Officer, an independent officer of this place, as opposed to directly to the government. This is common sense, what every other province in Canada does. It's what Alberta did for 114 years.

Ms Notley: No other government in Canada or anywhere in the Commonwealth has presumed to fire someone who's in the midst of investigating them, Mr. Speaker.

Now, more people. Mount Royal professor Duanne Bratt calls it, quote, a cover-up, plain and simple, and a travesty of democracy and justice. U of C political scientist Lisa Young says that the Premier is "trying to lay the groundwork for those who have [already] been fined for breaking election law to walk away." U of C political scientist Melanee Thomas says, quote, the Premier is using the power of the state to silence an independent body, and this is corrupt. Premier, a simple question: why do so many Albertans think you are corrupt?

Mr. Kenney: It's so sad over there that they're now resorting to quoting NDP candidates like Ms Thomas as objective sources.

Mr. Speaker, for 114 years this province had one bureaucracy administering the elections law until the NDP decided to create an entirely redundant office. We have restored the same independent implementation of election law that existed for the first 114 years of our history, the same model that exists in every other province and at the federal level. It's going to save taxpayers' money and will strengthen the independence of the office of the commissioner.

Bill 22 Votes

Ms Notley: Quote: I don't see a conflict of interest. End quote. That's the Premier telling the Ethics Commissioner that he, the one under investigation, is the best judge of whether or not he can fire his investigator. This Premier fled the province to avoid voting on this bill. He knows that he's in conflict. Clearly, this plan to abuse their power was cooked up behind closed doors within his cabinet. The question is: did the Premier recuse himself, did he hide from those discussions, or did he in fact orchestrate those discussions? We need an answer.

Mr. Kenney: Again, Mr. Speaker, Bill 22 was principally about the consolidation of agencies, boards, and commissions per our government's budgetary mandate to reduce unnecessary duplication. We did this with respect to dozens of agencies, boards, and commissions. I will remind the NDP leader that both of our legacy parties opposed the creation of the separate Election Commissioner's office because it was completely unnecessary and redundant bureaucracy, so we have followed through on the position that we took two years ago and during the last election. Now the Chief Electoral Officer says that "all investigations begun by the Office of the Election Commissioner will continue under . . ."

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, most people do not believe that their accountability to the law is redundant.

The Ethics Commissioner warned these folks that anyone under investigation and anyone with direct associates under investigation would likely be in breach of section 2 of the Conflicts of Interest Act had they voted. Since this Premier is under investigation, discussing this bill with his whole cabinet, who would consider this Premier their direct associate, not to mention the many other UCP operatives under investigation, will this Premier admit that this

corrupt bill is an attempt to further his own political interests by making his cabinet break ethics laws?

2:00

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the NDP leader is just reaching beyond the point of desperation now. The truth is that she was seeking to break the Constitution of Canada by encouraging the Lieutenant Governor to ignore the democratic will of the elected people of Alberta. [interjection] The NDP leader is heckling angrily. You know why? She's still upset that she was fired by Alberta voters a few months ago.

We are keeping our word to consolidate redundant agencies, boards, and commissions and the position we took, consistently opposed to two separate election bureaucracies. [interjection]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie will be cautious with what he chooses to heckle or not heckle.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, our Constitution is founded on the rule of law, and the member opposite is now the absolute textbook case of what it looks like when you break the rule of law. Now, the Ethics Commissioner said that several members of the UCP either are or likely would be in breach of conflict of interest if they voted on Bill 22. Now she will have to investigate serious breaches of the law over there as a result of this rushed vote. To the Premier: with new investigations under way, how can we be sure that you're not going to be firing the Ethics Commissioner next?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, once again, the enforcement of the elections law now continues with the Election Commissioner consolidated within the office of the Chief Electoral Officer. That is effectively the system that Alberta had in place for 114 years, that exists in every other province. It's the position that the two legacy parties of this government took in opposition. It's consistent with the position we took with Albertans, and it's consistent with the continuation of any investigations with the office of the Chief Electoral Officer.

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

Bill 22 and Public Service Pension Changes

Ms Notley: You know, Mr. Speaker, this Premier loves to brag about his mandate, but he does not have a mandate for corruption, and he also doesn't have a mandate for stealing control of people's pensions, two things in Bill 22 he never consulted on, never ran on, never told anyone he was planning to do. Unlike this Premier, these public servants weren't handed a golden pension from Ottawa. They earned it by paying into it their whole career. Why does this Premier think his opinion is more important than theirs when it comes to their retirement savings?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, the leader of the NDP should know that all public-sector pension plans in Alberta have been managed, in terms of their assets, by the Alberta Investment Management Corporation. There was one outlier, which is costing taxpayers and teachers \$42 million a year for redundant administration. Taxpayers contribute 50 per cent of the premiums to that plan. The ATRF board will continue to oversee its administration by AIMCo. The chair of that ATRF board will be an ATA representative. This is consistent with how all other public pensions are managed.

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, historically AIMCo has been a reasonably safe bet because they're free from political interference, but as we see with this Premier, all he does is politically interfere. No laws apply to him. He'll fire his own investigator, and he'll start telling the experts at AIMCo how to invest Albertans' retirement savings, too. Bill 22 says that the government can dictate 10 per cent of AIMCo funds, billions of dollars. To the Premier: what gives you the right to make risky decisions with the retirement savings of regular Albertan families? Who do you think you are?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, the entire preamble of the question was false. Secondly, who did she think she was when she had AIMCo investing all of the public-sector pensions in the province save one?

We are able now to take the \$20 million of government savings by consolidating asset administration at AIMCo and put that to the front lines of the education system. The NDP would rather use that money to offer seven-figure salaries to investment managers for a redundant public-sector pension plan. It makes no sense.

Ms Notley: The Premier seems to be struggling. Let me help. The Premier gets a sweet six-figure pension from Ottawa when he turns 55. I'm sure he's looking forward to it. Let me help you understand what it is you're doing. Imagine Justin Trudeau took control of your pension without your permission and started investing it in SNC-Lavalin. I think you'd be a touch upset. You would want to defend your pension from greedy politicians, just like these workers do. Why won't you listen to these Albertans and leave their retirement savings alone?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, it is becoming shameful to hear the leader of the NDP raise totally unfounded and irrational fears amongst people about their retirement savings. Let me remind her that as Premier she maintained a policy where AIMCo was managing the assets for every public-sector worker in the province, save one group, which is spending \$42 million in redundant administrative costs, which can be saved to provide greater resources for front-line education and, in due course, to also reduce premiums for teachers.

Gender-based Violence Prevention

Ms Glasgo: Mr. Speaker, Alberta has the third-highest level of reported domestic and intimate partner violence. It is reported that a dozen Alberta women are killed every year in domestic disputes. We also know that coming forward can be frightening due to stigma. Can the Minister of Community and Social Services tell us what the government is doing to empower survivors of domestic violence and ensure that Alberta women can make informed decisions about their domestic partners?

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

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you to the member for that question. Mr. Speaker, Alberta has one of the highest rates of domestic violence among Canadian provinces, and we're committed to protecting vulnerable Albertans who may be at risk or affected by this pervasive issue. In fact, Alberta had 10,000 victims of domestic violence in 2017 alone. In October we introduced Bill 17, disclosure to protect against domestic violence legislation, that will give people the ability to request information about an intimate partner's violent past. We believe this law could save lives and empower people at risk to make informed decisions.

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

Ms Glasgo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Minister of Community and Social Services for her advocacy. Given that today is recognized as the first day of the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence and given that this government has prioritized the prevention of intimate partner violence and given that there are community stakeholders doing significant work to prevent violence, what is this government doing to engage, inform, and educate Albertans about this important issue?

The Speaker: The minister of the status of women.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's been an absolute privilege, especially this past weekend, working with the CFL commissioner, Mr. Ambrosie, along with the work that we're doing to really shine a very, very bright light on domestic violence through their programming. I'm very proud to work with the Premier and the Minister of Community and Social Services, who are so completely dedicated to making sure that we attack this absolutely abhorrent act and that we shine bright lights on it as soon as possible.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Glasgo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there are many types of gender-based violence that go widely underreported and given that there have been reports of Canadian women taken abroad for female genital mutilation and given that this barbaric practice permanently maims women and vulnerable girls and given that our government is taking action on gender-based violence, can the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women tell us how we can all get involved in raising awareness on this important issue.

The Speaker: The Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. We begin this 16 days of activism against gender-based violence, and this is a vital tool that encourages people every single day to be able to go out into their communities and to stand beside each other, especially acknowledging bystanders and what the importance is of what people can do. We are going to be having a free screening of a very, very important documentary on Wednesday, and we would invite all members of the Legislature to join us to learn about female genital mutilation.

The Speaker: The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Public- and Private-sector Layoffs

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, Albertans didn't vote for this corruption and abuse of power. They thought they were voting for job creation. Well, let's check in on that. On Wednesday 125 workers at Alberta Innovates got the news that this Premier had fired them. That's about 20 per cent of the workers at an agency that created 2,000 new private-sector jobs over the past year alone. Why is this Premier firing people from an agency that was creating private-sector jobs and diversifying our economy just to pay for this Premier's \$4.7 billion corporate handout?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Layoffs are always challenging, especially for the families affected. The decision was made due to

the fiscal situation the previous NDP government left us. Their reckless spending policies have required us to clean up their mess. Alberta Innovates, as all government departments, is in an effort of restructuring, finding efficiencies, and finding ways to deliver more effectively.

2:10

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that on day 2 of the Premier's trip to Texas 300 teachers in Calgary found out that the Premier had fired them, too, and given that that's what happens when you cut more than \$30 million from a district budget and given that the Education minister actually told this House that she doesn't understand what's going on, I'll ask the Premier: why are 300 classrooms full of children losing their teachers to pay for this Premier's \$4.7 billion corporate handout, and does the Premier think that that's what Albertans voted for?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, I'm surprised that a school board with a \$1.2 billion operating budget wouldn't be able to find enough efficiencies and be able to optimize to ensure that layoffs didn't occur. The Education minister announced that she will be conducting a financial review and a governance review of the Calgary board of education, a school division that, quite frankly, in the past has been known to not make financially responsible decisions. We will get to the bottom of that.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that on Thursday, day 3 of the Premier's Texas trip, Calgarians rallied at the U of C to protest the Premier's firing of 250 workers there and given that that adds up to 675 public-sector jobs lost in three days to pay for the Premier's \$4.7 billion corporate handout, what does the Premier have to say to those hundreds of Albertans who were working to make their communities stronger, and did he go to Texas just to avoid looking them in the eye?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, I recognize the challenge when jobs are lost and the hardship experienced by families. We recognize that that is true, but in October there were over 20,000 private-sector jobs created, which we find encouraging. We're confident that the policies that we're implementing will attract investment and create good jobs for Albertans. This government was elected to bring financial responsibility back to the province, and that's what we're doing.

The Speaker: The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since this government was elected, we've lost over 10,000 jobs. Now, clearly the Premier thinks his government gets a pass on corruption if his \$4.7 billion corporate handout creates jobs, but while the Premier was in Texas, Lowe's Canada announced the closure of six stores across Alberta, more than 300 job layoffs, and this, of course, follows Husky and EnCana and others who took the Premier's handout and laid off hundreds of Albertans. How much evidence does this Premier need before he admits that his no-jobs corporate handout is a complete and utter failure?

Ms Fir: Mr. Speaker, it's strange to see that the member opposite, the Leader of the Opposition, suddenly cares about the economy after their government raised taxes on job creators by 20 per cent, took in less revenue from those taxes, and drove tens of billions of dollars in investment out of our province. We take no lessons from any of the members opposite on how to grow an economy after they spent four catastrophic years destroying it. If what they were doing

was so right and they knew what they were doing, why did Albertans put them on that side of the bench?

Ms Notley: Well, given that the members opposite have broken pretty much every promise they made to Albertans since the election and given that also last week Federated Co-operatives announced the closure of its warehouse in northeast Calgary and the layoffs of more than 200 Calgary workers and given that Federated Co-ops is closing that warehouse because its main customer can get a better deal from a B.C.-based company, how does the Premier – the Premier – explain the failure of his \$4.7 billion corporate handout to those 200 Calgary warehouse workers?

Ms Fir: Mr. Speaker, once again, we take no lessons on job creation from the NDP government, that oversaw the loss of 170,000 jobs and the loss of tens of billions of private-sector investment. As was mentioned, October job numbers show an increase of 20,000 private-sector jobs in Alberta. The members opposite didn't care about layoffs in Calgary when they brought in their job-killing carbon tax and raised taxes on job creators. Once again, if they knew what they were doing, and if what they were doing was in the best interests of Albertans, why did Albertans put them over there?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that “We won; they lost,” is not actually an economic plan and given that just last week, while the Premier was in Texas, we saw retail sales in Alberta fall significantly even as they rose everywhere else in the country and given that's hardly a surprise since this Premier is sacking thousands of Albertans, who have then less money to spend in their local stores, causing more private-sector job losses, why won't the Premier spend more time creating jobs, less time firing people, less time abusing his power, less time attacking democracy, and less time breaking the rule of law for the first time in history?

Ms Fir: Mr. Speaker, our government and our Premier and our entire team are working hard to bring jobs back to Alberta. Our Associate Minister of Natural Gas was in Japan and South Korea, the Premier was in Houston, and I was in Chicago and Minneapolis, taking a team approach to bringing investment back to Alberta, not spending four years sitting behind a desk, raising taxes, and driving investment out of this province. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. [interjections] Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland is the only one with the call.

Traffic Safety

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When travelling our roads and highways, we feel safe and with good reason: we have good infrastructure. When something happens to us motorists, we feel safe because only a cellphone call away there is a tow truck driver to help us when we need them the most. It has come to my attention, however, that we've recently lost another tow truck driver while performing his job. Such a loss cannot be acceptable, and the safety of these hard-working men and women must be ensured. I and many of my constituents want to ensure that such a tragedy is prevented in the future. To the Minister of Transportation: can you advise what is being done to assist our tow truck drivers so that they can be safe on the road while doing their jobs?

The Speaker: The Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the hon. member for the question. First of all, I'd like to express my concern

and sympathy for the tow truck driver that lost his life, for his family, and loved ones. I want people to know that we take safety on Alberta highways very, very seriously. We are constantly looking for ways to improve safety on Alberta roads, and right now we're actually spending some time thinking about how we might make life more safe for tow truck drivers and other people working on Alberta's roads. When they're keeping the rest of us safe, we need to look after them, too.

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

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that another vital part of our economic growth is transporting goods and services in a timely manner and given that the Acheson business park is a major economic hub for the capital region and given that the transportation of goods and investment in the area is stifled due to the movement of 50 trains a day crossing highway 60 and given that we are also concerned about safety, committed to job growth, and growing opportunities and investment for Albertans, can the minister please advise the Assembly on what we are looking to do for the solution in Acheson regarding the highway 60 overpass?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. member. Safety on every road in Alberta is an issue that just doesn't sleep, and we need to be constantly vigilant. Budget 2019 commits \$8 million to major improvements on highway 60, west of Edmonton. It will twin highway 60 between highway 16 and 16A and construct an overpass over the Canadian National Railway tracks, when they get back to work, and realign the interchange at highway 16A. This is a safety issue, as every construction project is, one of many that we are considering.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, I'm sure that there will be some connectivity here in the third supplemental.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll connect the dots quickly. On anything that has highway or train traffic, we're talking about safety here. In my constituency we have a bunch of them, sir.

The third question that I have here is given that rural communities are intersected by and often have major highways running through them and folks need more time to transition and slow down while they're going through these communities and that out in my area we have Gainford, where they're looking to have their speed limit sign moved to the east approximately 500 metres, which will give the traffic that's travelling through that area ample time to slow down, can you please advise, Minister, what can be done out in Gainford?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the third question on highway safety. I wanted to let the hon. member know that the speed limit review completed in October 2019 found that the existing 80-kilometre-per-hour zone through Gainford is appropriate. However, the review also recommended that the 80-kilometre zone be extended at both the east and west ends of Gainford in order to enhance safety. So I'm hoping that the hon. member's constituents will be pleased to know that we expect to have the extended 80-kilometre zone done by the end of this year.

2:20 Support for Youths Transitioning Out of Care

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, according to the Children's Services website at least two former foster children have died in the past 11

days. We have learned as well that there may actually be three deaths and that all came as a result of suicide. In light of these tragedies I rise in this House with the hope of convincing this Premier and the Children's Services minister to reverse their heartless cuts to the support and financial assistance agreements program that support these young people. To the Minister: what can you tell us about these tragic deaths, and will you now reconsider the cuts to these vital supports?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Schulz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Any time a young person in our province dies, it is a tragedy, and my heart goes out to their families. We post all deaths publicly and are committed to being as transparent as we can, although the member opposite would know that I can't speak to specific cases. I rely on the great work being done by the office of the Child and Youth Advocate to point out where we can make continuous shifts in policy and practice to better support children and youth in care in our province, and a large part of that is working to identify ways we can work with the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions to better support young people who have gone through such trauma.

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

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that long-time advocate and outreach worker Wallis Kendal said today that this government is playing Russian roulette with the lives of these former foster children by cutting their age of eligibility for supports from 24 to 22 and given that the Premier can somehow find \$4.7 billion to hand over to big corporations but is turning his back on young adults attempting to get their lives on track, once again to the Premier or the minister: will you please reverse the cuts to supports for these young people?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Currently part of the work that our ministry is undertaking is reviewing all support and financial assistance agreements. Ultimately, a number of these young people past the age of 22 choose to end their connection with the Ministry of Children's Services. A number of these young people between the ages of 22 and 24 are making a transition into other lifelong adult supports through government. We are working as the Ministry of Children's Services along with the Ministry of Community and Social Services to ensure that at whatever age those young people transition, it is seamless.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that a number of the young people who recently lost their lives were actually above the age of 22 and on the support and financial assistance agreements and given that the Child and Youth Advocate released a report today on six young people transitioning out of government care who died in 2018 and given that the advocate in response to these deaths made recommendations to strengthen supports such as safe housing and staff training and given that it's clear the advocate believes that the age of eligibility should remain at 24 and that these people need more supports, not less, to the Premier and the minister. The budget hasn't passed yet. I'm begging you. Will you reverse the cuts to supports for these young . . .

The Speaker: The minister.

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, we are reviewing these programs and identifying where there are ways where policy and practice can shift to better support these transitions into adulthood. The reality is that oftentimes some of the most important supports are the social and emotional supports for these young adults as they transition into adulthood. We are going to continue to fund mentoring. We have increased the advancing futures program by a million dollars. This is a program that doesn't exist anywhere else in Canada. We are going to continue to support these young people as they transition out of the child intervention system.

Seniors Advocate Health Advocate Appointment

Ms Sigurdson: "What steps will this new government take to answer the Wildrose call to create an independent advocate for our seniors?" That was the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. I did answer his call and appointed a dedicated advocate for seniors. That member must be crushed to learn that his own UCP government is undoing that and merging the job into the Health Advocate. Did the minister of seniors explain her decision to this member before she went back to the failed PC-era plan?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Pon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank the current Seniors Advocate for her service to seniors and their families and wish her well as she returns to teaching, her academic career. The current office of the Seniors Advocate will continue to support Albertans until December 24. Health and Seniors and Housing staff will develop a transitional plan for continued service to Alberta's seniors, their families, and service providers who are asking for information and referrals on issues of concern.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that the Health Advocate is also taking on a third job, the Mental Health Patient Advocate, and given that seniors will now have at best a third of the advocacy that they got under our government, again to the minister: why do you have money for private planes, energy war rooms, and five-star London hotels but no money for seniors?

The Speaker: The Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Pon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The service currently provided by the office of the Seniors Advocate will continue. Funding for the office of the Seniors Advocate staff will be transferred from Seniors and Housing to Health, and a combined office can address concerns more efficiently given that in 2018-19 almost one-third of inquiries were health related.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that this government is already deep into PC-style patronage appointments for their cronies, donors, and supporters and given that the appointment of former PC Party and United Conservative Party executive director Janice Harrington to be the advocate for health, mental health, and now seniors is perhaps the greasiest patronage appointment of them all, did the minister look for a qualified person at all, or is she content to reward her partisan friends at seniors' expense?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health has risen.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We were pleased to appoint Janice Harrington as our new Health Advocate. She is highly qualified and will serve Albertans well. With an extensive background in leading organizations through rapid transformation and change, Janice is uniquely qualified to advocate on behalf of

Albertans for positive health and mental health outcomes. [interjections] The incumbent Seniors Advocate as well will be returning to her job at the University of Alberta. A combined office will result in annualized savings of close to half a million dollars, and this matters at a time when we must be very mindful of the costs. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Camrose has a question.

Rural Crime, Biosecurity, and Property Rights

Ms Lovely: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituency of Camrose recently hosted the Minister of Justice on his tour around the province to discuss rural crime. There was an outcry from the community about the heinous crimes that had been committed against them in rural Alberta. Recently, while at the RCMP Regimental Ball in Viking, members and constituents shared with me their frustration regarding dropped charges after an extensive effort to catch criminals. To the Minister of Justice: what proactive initiative is our government taking to correct this injustice?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. Our prosecutors simply have too high of a caseload. That's why I'm proud that today we announced the fact that we're doubling our articling class of law students for the next year, 2020. We will be increasing it by 150 per cent in 2021. This will give us a pipeline of young students and Albertans to come and be part of Alberta Justice. We're also encouraging many of them to take up positions in rural Alberta. Once a lawyer sets up roots in a community, we will be making sure that those members also build relationships in the community, and then they will have a higher likelihood of staying.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for his answer. Given that protesters are causing cross-contamination by trespassing from regular farmland onto organic farmland, a massive issue in my constituency, and given our government's recent announcements about rural crime and given the difficulty in being recognized as an organic farm and given our government's commitment to protecting farmers and their property, to the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General: what is our government's plan to protect the biosecurity of Alberta's environment?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the things we heard loud and clear from Albertans is that they want the strongest property rights possible. We've worked with the minister of agriculture to bring forward Bill 27, and that right there is going to provide Albertans with the security they need to know that they have the strongest property rights possible. We're going to make sure that we have fines for people that trespass: \$10,000 for the first instance and up to \$25,000 for a follow-up and also jail time if they repeat. Albertans deserve clarity that we stand with law-abiding Albertans. We stand with our farmers. They do amazing work.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given the importance of maintaining accreditation to many of the

local organic farmers in my constituency and given the risk that trespassers pose via the risk of cross-contamination and given there seems to be no ability for farmers to protect their property under current legislation and given our government's promise to take action in regard to the protection of rural property rights, can the minister please elaborate on what kinds of changes are being considered for the protection of my constituents and other law-abiding Albertans?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In addition to making sure we have the strongest property rights possible, we're also providing enhanced powers to our sheriffs, our fish and wildlife officers, and also our commercial vehicle officers. That's what we're calling our RAPID force, an additional 400 law enforcement boots, with enhanced powers, on the ground to help keep law-abiding Albertans safe. We heard this loud and clear. We consulted with Albertans, and we've taken action based on their recommendations. This isn't done. We're not spiking the football. These are concrete steps that we're taking. It's the beginning of helping to right the wrongs of rural Albertans. Many of these people have felt like they haven't had a voice for years. They have a voice now in this government.

Speaker's Ruling Supplementary Questions

The Speaker: I might just provide a cautionary note to private members who are asking questions. Traditionally the lead question and two supplementals all connect. I think I've provided significant latitude in the past. Perhaps today that latitude has been stretched beyond the point of what a supplementary question is. We can do better in the future.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Government Photography Contract

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, communications and public engagement is an agency within Treasury Board and Finance. It's supposed to be nonpartisan. It's supposed to follow government rules for competitive bids for contracts, but in July a small Calgary company called Vek Labs got a \$73,000 sole-source contract for "photography and video services." Why did the Minister of Finance approve this lucrative sole-source contract for Vek Labs?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, our government was elected to bring fiscal responsibility to this province. We've delivered a budget that will do just that. We're confident that our four-year fiscal plan is the plan that Albertans elected us on. We will deliver on that plan. Careful procurement is very important to us and part of our plan going forward. We will look into the member's question.

Ms Phillips: Given that I might have a partial answer for the minister, Mr. Speaker, and given that the young man who owns Vek Labs is the son of a generous UCP donor, given that Vek Labs made several campaign videos for the UCP on the party side, including a short documentary film about the Premier visiting his hometown that was shown at the UCP convention in February, isn't it true that the Finance minister handed a \$73,000 no-bid contract to this company because of its close partisan ties to the UCP and to the Premier himself?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, the hypocrisy of the other side needs to stop. Let's take a tour down NDP lane, this time in advanced education. Athabasca University: we have a donor here of \$3,000 to the NDP, appointed to the board; \$4,000 donation to the NDP, appointed to the board; \$3,000 donor to the NDP, appointed to the board. Stop the hypocrisy.

Ms Phillips: Given that, Mr. Speaker, if the Justice minister wants to attack the judiciary, he should just come out and say so, but given that the film industry is reeling from this government cancelling their tax credits in order to pay for the Premier's \$4.7 billion corporate handout, given that Alberta's hard-working and talented filmmakers and videographers should have been able to put in a competitive bid for that government contract, to the Minister of Finance: please explain to Albertans why this government has returned to Tory-land tactics and reserved fat, no-bid contracts for donors and friends.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, this is just more fear and smear from the Official Opposition. You want to talk about appointments. That member was the environment minister for an NDP government who appointed Tzeporah Berman to an official panel associated with the oil sands, a person who is dedicated to stopping the entire energy industry. We will not be lectured by that side of the House when it comes to appointments. We will not tolerate the fear and smear over and over from the NDP. This is why Albertans fired them seven months ago.

Bill 207

Member Irwin: Mr. Speaker, a few days ago four UCP MLAs stood with our caucus to vote down the repugnant Bill 207 in committee. This bill posed a real threat to the health care of many Albertans, so I thank those UCP MLAs for standing up to protect Albertans' access to reproductive health services and medical assistance in dying. A few ministers also declared their opposition, including the minister responsible for status of women, but she did so without mentioning women's reproductive rights, abortion, or LGBTQ2S-plus rights. Will she now acknowledge that Bill 207 was an attack on those rights?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. Bill 207 was redundant and unnecessary, and that is why I did not vote for it.

Member Irwin: Given, Mr. Speaker, that a majority of UCP MLAs on the committee voted to uphold the rights of Albertans to access abortion and other reproductive health services, but given that the MLA for Cardston-Siksika did vote in favour of this terrible bill and that during debate he even tried to compare reproductive health to eugenics – shameful – will the Minister of Health reject the shocking and hurtful statement from the MLA and call for him to publicly apologize?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, one of the reasons why I'm so proud to be part of this government is that we committed to being able to respect the private members' process of this place and respect free votes. Albertans were clear to us that they wanted their MLAs to be able to have free votes when it comes to private members' business before this House. I'm proud of this government for enshrining that within the standing orders of this Legislature. We will continue to stand up for the right of each individual

member of this place to be able to exercise their conscience when it comes to private members' business because that's what we promised Albertans. Promise made, promise kept.

Member Irwin: Given, Mr. Speaker, that many members of the UCP caucus relied on support from antichoice groups like RightNow and The Wilberforce Project and given the Premier's long-standing opposition to abortion, including statements in the past comparing it to slavery, and given that voting against Bill 207 could maybe indicate a potential fresh start for this government on women's rights, will the Premier confirm that he himself will vote against any further attempts from his colleagues to limit reproductive rights?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. I'm very honoured to be part of a very diverse caucus. It's a huge privilege to be able to debate in this House, but I will not, nor will anybody else on this front bench, be commenting on potential legislation that has not crossed our desks yet.

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

Postsecondary Education System

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's postsecondary system is broken. Costs are through the roof on spending per student. Alberta spends nearly double on administration than Ontario and B.C., and despite all this spending, our province underperforms in participation and completion. Albertans are not graduating and not getting jobs. To the Minister of Advanced Education: just how serious is this situation, and how does this spending impact services to students such as those at Lethbridge College and the University of Lethbridge?

The Speaker: The Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Nicolaidis: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is absolutely correct. The situation that we've inherited is quite problematic and quite dire, and we are absolutely intent on addressing the real systemic problems with the system. To give you some perspective, over the last 15 years enrolment in our postsecondary system has increased by 21 per cent. However, funding to our postsecondary institutions has increased by 106 per cent. What's more troubling is the amount that we spend on administration. We spend \$8,000 per student on administration here in the province of Alberta. B.C. does it for \$4,000 and Ontario for \$5,000. We believe we can do better.

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given the commitment for a funding model change and given the necessity of finding a solution for tuition that makes sense for students and for the public purse, can the minister elaborate on how the current funding method contributed to this fiscal situation and how a new funding model will correct it while ensuring access to services is not inhibited for students like the ones who choose to study in Lethbridge?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Nicolaidis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again the member is correct. The current funding mechanism that we have for our

postsecondary education system is not working. There's a wide discrepancy between the amount that's distributed per student – for example, there are some institutions where the amount of funding is upwards of \$30,000 per student, and in other places much less – so we are really looking at addressing this situation. We'll be moving forward, implementing a new funding model that will help us be more diligent with our tax dollars.

Mr. Neudorf: Given that Alberta has a long-standing spending problem that spans multiple governments and given our government's commitment to sort our fiscal situation out, to the same minister: will reform in our postsecondary system give institutions more flexibility to generate their own revenue, while maintaining consumer protection for students, in order to create a system that is more innovative in its delivery of postsecondary education and more independent from relying on taxpayers?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, I know that the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction will be quite happy. We're looking at taking a series of different approaches to reduce red tape in our postsecondary institutions so that they can be free to innovate and compete and continue to generate high-quality research and, by the same token, be innovative in their revenue generation, engage in commercial activities without having to get drawn down in red tape.

2:40

The Speaker: Hon. members, in 30 seconds or less we will proceed to Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

Bangladesh

Member Loyola: Mr. Speaker, on October 7, 2019, Abrar Fahad, a 21-year-old student at the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, was brutally murdered for taking a stand on Bangladesh's interests through a social media post. His attackers were members of the student wing of the ruling party. Before perishing, he was tortured for seven hours. Abrar's right to free speech was upheld by the Bangladeshi Constitution and the universal declaration of human rights, but this right and Abrar's life were still undermined and coldly discarded by his assassins.

That anyone should fall victim to crime or fear for their safety for exercising their fundamental human rights is absolutely unacceptable. In solidarity with the Justice for Abrar movement, Bangladeshi community members gathered on the steps of this very Legislature yesterday to form a human chain and demand that justice be served, and I was proud to stand with them. At their event they stated that the systemic use of violence to suppress free speech is unfortunately commonplace in Bangladesh and is often sanctioned by political doctrine. The tragedy that befell Abrar Fahad is not an isolated incident.

In solidarity with them I bring this injustice to the attention of the Alberta Legislature to heighten public awareness of human rights violations in Bangladesh and to urge not only us but the Canadian government as well to take action in addressing this internationally. Abrar Fahad was a young student with a promising future who meant only to think critically and to express his opinion. For this, he lost his life. By raising our voices against this oppression and encouraging others to do the same, we aim to inspire and lay the foundation for a brighter future in which civil discourse and exchange replace senseless violence and conflict.

Free speech is likewise protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and to have this value violated in one country

is to have it violated in all. The Bangladeshi community believes that it is imperative that we all stand united in calling for accountability and prompt action, united in calling for principles for which we stand, and that the perpetrators of this heinous crime be brought to justice.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Scleroderma

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Scleroderma: hard word, harder disease. Affecting approximately 1,700 Albertans, scleroderma is a rare, chronic, multisymptom autoimmune disease that affects the body's connective tissue. In scleroderma, cells start making collagen as if there was an injury that needs repair. The cells do not turn off as they should and end up making too much. The extra collagen in the tissues can prevent the body's organs from functioning normally. In simple terms, the disease creates a thickening and hardening both internally and externally. It's like your organs are slowly turning to stone. The cause of scleroderma is unknown, and currently there is no cure.

Mr. Speaker, there are treatments that can help slow the process down and improve the quality and quantity of life for persons affected by the disease, but these can be costly or difficult to access. Albertans living with this rare and debilitating condition face significant physical and emotional challenges, often resulting in feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, and being a burden to others. At first glance those living with scleroderma can seem perfectly healthy, which makes the disabling condition even more challenging. The fatigue alone can be debilitating and misunderstood. Those suffering will face unwitting comments like: yeah, I had a bad sleep last night, too.

But with despair, there is still hope. The scleroderma society of Canada is an organization focused on raising awareness, funds, and support for those with this disease in an effort to find a cure. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the entire team at the scleroderma society of Canada, who joined us last week here at the Legislature. They are terrific leaders in the fight to find a cure for this little-known but disabling disease. In particular, I'd like to thank Maureen Sauvé for sharing so openly her personal and painful journey of living these past 18 years with scleroderma. Currently there is no co-ordination of support groups in Alberta, and the society is working to change that. To those in Alberta living with this debilitating condition: they want you to know that you are not alone.

Thank you.

The Speaker: I, too, would like to thank the team for scleroderma. I've been practising the word all weekend.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to provide oral notice of Government Motion 38. Shall I read it into the record?

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government of Canada to take all steps necessary to immediately introduce emergency legislation to compel Canadian National Railway employees to return to work in order to prevent the potentially devastating impact of a strike on not just Alberta's economy but Canada's economy as a whole.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Are there tablings? I see the hon. Member for St. Albert is rising.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have copies of some of the correspondence that I've received at our constituency office from teachers in St. Albert talking about the pressures of classroom sizes. I'd like to table those as well as an article from Stanford University entitled *Climate Change on Pace to Occur 10 Times Faster than Any Change Recorded in Past 65 Million Years*, Stanford Scientists Say. I referred to it in my member's statement today.

The Speaker: Are there other tablings? Someone circle the calendar.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Dreeshen, Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, pursuant to the Farm Implement Act the Farmers' Advocate Office annual report 2018-19.

On behalf of the hon. Mrs. Sawhney, Minister of Community and Social Services, pursuant to the Protection Against Family Violence Act the Family Violence Death Review Committee 2018-2019 annual report.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

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

Bill 204 Election Recall Act

[Debate adjourned November 18: Mr. Bilous speaking]

The Speaker: Hon. members, is there anyone wishing to join in the debate this afternoon? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore has risen.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate you recognizing me this afternoon to be able to speak to Bill 204, the Election Recall Act. As you're probably aware, I was a part of the committee that initially reviewed this bill. We, of course, decided to send this back to the House so that we get a chance to talk about this bill today. At this moment I'm not in a position that I would be able to support the bill. However, if there were some changes that were made around this bill, I might have the opportunity to take a second look and possibly put my support behind it.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Of the concerns I have, one of the biggest ones, of course, is language. We see some language in here, and just based on some of the debates that we've had in this House and the bills that we've seen passed, including such things as Bill 22, where we seem to have had a bit of a discussion around what the word "may" entails and how, apparently, according to the Minister of Municipal Affairs, that's interchangeable with the words "will" and "shall" – keeping that kind of thing in mind, I have some concerns around Bill 204 and around how some of the wording may play out.

Some questions that I think I might have, moving forward, would be around corporate and union donations. Certainly, when we look at the recall act, it excludes those within it, but should the government of the day decide to repeal those kinds of things, how would that, then, affect this recall act?

2:50

I think that when you're looking at the topic of recalling an MLA, certainly I think that is a situation that exists solely between the constituents of that MLA and, of course, themselves. When I start seeing, potentially, some loopholes here around third-party advertisers getting involved, I get a little bit concerned around that, Mr. Speaker. So I would like to see some language that maybe inhibits third-party advertisers to participate. Again, this should be between the constituents and the MLA. I mean, if they're that angry as to recall the MLA for whatever their actions may or even may not be, then certainly I don't think third-party advertisers need to be involved in that sort of thing.

We've seen some things around some of the timelines, things like that, and some of the discussion that ensued around maybe some of the fees. Obviously, we're going to have to have a bit of a deeper debate, going forward, on that.

I didn't want my comments to go too long here. I just wanted the opportunity to get up and point out some things that I would like to see potentially adjusted and some further debates around some of the other language. Like I said, when I'm seeing things like the Election Commissioner being terminated, around that language, and then not being rehired immediately – you know, the word "may" is supposed to now mean the same as "will" and "shall," and that certainly doesn't seem to be the case – then I would be very, very concerned, potentially, around some of the language that's contained in 204.

So at the moment I'm not prepared to support this moving forward, but I do look forward to maybe more debate further on, including in Committee of the Whole, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Are there any other hon. members looking to join debate?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon to close debate.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour today to rise and speak to Bill 204, the Election Recall Act. It's my belief that this bill will strengthen Alberta's democracy by enabling Albertans to recall an elected official should the need arise. The right of recall, I believe, helps to ensure that a member of the Legislature stays truly accountable to their constituents.

Mr. Speaker, this important piece of legislation is crucial for keeping our democracy thriving and our members truly serving the needs of Albertans. By definition we are a representative democracy, and that's the very core of what we are called to do, to represent. That means that we must embody the needs of our constituents.

Trying to ensure that representatives actually represent their constituents has a long history in Alberta. Sir Frederick Haultain, Premier of the North-West Territories, successfully lobbied for provincial status but was not successful in creating a Legislature where party politics and party solidarity would not dominate the Legislature.

Recall was introduced to me when I became a member of the Reform Party. This party espoused a grassroots vision of democracy that spoke to myself and to thousands of Albertans and Canadians.

Recall should not be easy, but allowing for recall brings the benefits of accountability to the electorate and provides a positive way forward for the electorate when it realizes that their representative must be replaced. This Election Recall Act is an attempt to rebalance our representative system of democracy so that the people of Alberta will be able to hold the MLA accountable

when they stray too far from their primary responsibility of representing their constituents.

The use of recall legislation is a just and proper tool to hold those elected officials accountable for their actions, and it reminds everyone in their party that individual MLAs are ultimately accountable to their electorate. Recall legislation exists in over a dozen countries, including the United Kingdom, and most states in the United States have recall legislation, but B.C. is the only other Canadian jurisdiction to have recall legislation in place. B.C. adopted the Recall Initiative Act in 1995. Mr. Speaker, recall should not be easy, and it does need to be crafted in such a way as to reduce the likelihood of recall for partisan reasons.

In B.C. 26 recall petitions have been requested, with only six petitions returning to the Chief Electoral Officer within the 60 days and only one petition having achieved the threshold for recall. However, the MLA in question resigned office before the recall petition came into effect. We can conclude from the example of B.C. that recalling an elected member has not been easy to achieve, and therefore it has not resulted in partisan politics disrupting an MLA's four-year term.

Secondly, B.C.'s recall history demonstrates that the recall legislation, in one sense, is a last resort to be used when an elected representative has lost their way and is no longer representing the high standards of elected office.

Private member's Bill 204, the Election Recall Act, is based on the thresholds of the B.C. legislation. It will require a petition numbering more than 40 per cent of the total number of electors that appeared on the post polling day list of electors from the last general election, and it has to be gathered within 60 days. Only those currently eligible to vote within the riding can sign the petition, and as done in B.C., there will also be a buffer before a recall petition can be started. Constituents will have to allow their elected MLA the chance to perform their duties; therefore, no petition can be started until 18 months following the election. In addition, no petition can be started within six months of the beginning of an election window, and only one petition can happen at a time.

Five hundred dollars will be required as a fee to initiate a recall, which will be refundable upon filing the financial statements, and donation limits are set to \$4,000 a person. Lastly, unexpended funds must be given to a charity to prevent political parties from using recall to pad their bank accounts.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 204, the Election Recall Act, will add one more needed piece of accountability into our system of democracy.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion carried; Bill 204 read a second time]

Bill 206

Workers' Compensation (Enforcement of Decisions) Amendment Act, 2019

The Acting Speaker: I believe that the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod has the call. Should the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod wish to move second reading on Bill 206, he has the call.

Mr. Reid: Absolutely. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise today on my private member's bill, Bill 206, the Workers' Compensation (Enforcement of Decisions) Amendment Act, 2019.

Over the years I have worked through various professions and for various companies, and I understand the reality of what happens in the workplace. One of my favourite places that I've worked and one of my favourite jobs was with a great Alberta company, WestJet.

WestJet prides itself on being a company that embraces and works hard on what we called our culture of safety. There are inherent risks in working in the airline industry, and the company worked very hard, right from the CEO all the way down, to ensure that a culture of safety was not only maintained but continued to be developed day after day.

However, even in the midst of those cases, I met many colleagues who had been injured in the line of work. Having the right mindset, having the right procedures, and having the right type of equipment all worked to reduce workplace accidents, but we also realized that sometimes they just are inevitable, and it happens. I've heard the tragedy of lives that were tragically changed by a simple overlooking of safety issues or just the fact that there are hazards that are present in almost every job in our society.

My understanding of workplace accidents grew more after I became a small-business owner and was responsible myself for developing that very same type of culture of safety in our workplace. We worked with hot ovens, sharp knives, hot beverages. We worked with a mix of young and old in a very fast-paced environment. Again, as much as we worked hard to make sure that accidents did not occur, sometimes they were unavoidable. Fortunately, they often tended to be minor burns, minor cuts, but sometimes slips and falls also happened as well.

3:00

As a small-business owner I had a great interest in making sure that my staff were well looked after. As a small-business man in Alberta we work very hard alongside those that are employees of our companies, and they become like family. I know we often had conversations with folks in the workplace when something would happen. We'd say: we need to make sure we do an incident report; we want to have the paperwork in place just in case this isn't as simple as we think. I wanted them to be able to make sure that they were compensated should the injury take them out of the workplace for a while.

As a business owner we pay our dues to WCB, and our expectation was that when our employees needed those benefits, those would be paid out to them in a timely manner. As I came into this role, I learned that that's not always the case for all workers in Alberta, and I think that's a tragedy. I was really excited to be able to bring forward this piece of legislation, which was actually started by a predecessor in the previous session, to really ensure that workers in Alberta that are injured in the workplace are properly taken care of. Those of us that run and own small businesses know that workers are our greatest asset, and to make sure that they and their families are taken care of well should be important to all of us.

The goal of my legislation is simple. It's to ensure that those who are forced to take a leave of absence because of a workplace injury can continue to put food on the table for them and their families. Difficulty in receiving money duly owed by a public agency should not mean a missed mortgage or credit card payment. Again, as a business owner I saw this all too often, employees who had missed time and were left abandoned by a system that we as business owners pay into for their protection. As a result, employees can feel pressured to return to work before they are really healthy enough to do so or will take out loans or put on extra credit card debt just to keep their heads above water.

There is an emotional toll on families who don't know where their next paycheque is coming from. We have seen that far too clearly over the last number of years as families struggle to make ends meet. Whether through the rapidly expanding opioid crisis in Alberta or increasing rates of suicide and depression, the last couple of years have demonstrated the large effect that economic issues can have on social issues. This bill does not claim that it will reverse

these issues en masse in any way, but if we can prevent even one family from facing that kind of economic uncertainty, the kind of uncertainty that breeds these issues, then it's worth it.

You may or may not be aware that there are five steps to any WCB claim. Hopefully, no one in this House has had to go through those procedures, but if you have, let me just bring you up to date. First, you need to report your injury. Next, your claim is classified as either a lost-time or no-time-lost claim. The third step is where my bill starts to have some effect. At the third stage a decision is made on whether a claim will be accepted, denied, or needs further medical investigation. If a claim is denied, an appeal can be made through the Appeals Commission. The Appeals Commission, should they reverse the decision of the WCB, then hands the decision back down to WCB, who is forced to comply. The Alberta Workers' Compensation Act, the legislation which oversees the Workers' Compensation Board, already puts a 30-day deadline on WCB to implement a decision of the Appeals Commission.

While a claimant could go to the courts already, Bill 206 reaffirms the rights of the claimant to go to the Court of Queen's Bench and ask for a court order directing the WCB to pay the due compensation immediately. This common-sense solution that prevents greater losses for families is a small change that I believe can have a large positive impact. The bill also grants claimants the ability to seek remuneration for legal costs related to any appeal made under section 13.3(2). This allows workers to proceed with a greater level of certainty. Again, Mr. Speaker, this is a very small change.

Bill 206 simply addresses a gap in the legislation that can and should be addressed. Chances are it will only affect a handful of decisions each year, but the scale of the change doesn't determine the importance of this legislation. Bill 206, should it pass, ensures that a family going through what is already a tough stretch of time has a little bit more stability.

Mr. Speaker, my final point is about accountability. I, like many on this side of the Assembly, ran on bringing accountability back to government, and this is one way we can do that. I believe that both of these changes can do much good for families going through trying times. Albertans who have been injured at work deserve to have peace of mind and know that they will be compensated on time. While small, I believe this change has potential to have wide-ranging positive impacts around the province.

I'd like to thank you all for your debate, and I'd like to thank all members for the support that they've expressed for this bill. I hope that we will see support from both sides of this House when we go to vote today.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Sorry. To the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod: I just want it to be clear for *Hansard* because I'm not sure that I heard it. Just to be clear, you are moving second reading of Bill 206. If you could just say yes.

Mr. Reid: I am moving second reading of Bill 206.

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

Are there any hon. members looking to join in this debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore has a thought.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's certainly a pleasure to be able to rise in support of Bill 206. Of course, I would highly encourage all members of this House to support this as well, but I think we should talk a little bit about what we're seeing here with this. With the Member for Livingstone-Macleod bringing this forward on behalf of some constituents that, unfortunately, had a

problem with WCB – my background being in labour, I'm always about the front-line worker. It's very, very, I guess, disappointing when I hear cases like this happen and constituents are not actually able to get a judgment that was due to them. I mean, when WCB was originally created, it was meant as a safety net for workers and, to some degree, as a safety net for businesses as well when workers get injured. We've heard that sometimes no matter what you do, the odd accident occurs. Thankfully, most of the time, hopefully, it's a cut finger, maybe a small sprain, something, you know, not too serious. But when there are serious injuries, that needs to be there to take the burden off workers while they're away from work and, of course, to be able to take the burden off employers as well. I mean, that's what they pay their premiums for.

I guess when I'm looking at this bill, as somebody who sat on not only my workplace health and safety committee – I sat on my union's provincial health and safety committee – I see a very genuine commitment from the Member for Livingstone-Macleod. You had talked about your time at WestJet. I do, of course, know that they place very high standards on their safety, trying to reduce the risk at the work site. I don't know if you remember, Mr. Speaker, on some other pieces of legislation where I'd be talking about how we're doing one thing over here, yet we're making decisions over here which may be a little bit counterproductive to that. So when I do see the government benches bringing in a government motion around legislating back to work for CN workers, promoting that, who are currently out on strike because of safety concerns, just like the folks from WestJet that work in a very, very dangerous situation – I mean, I don't know if I'd be willing to walk around on a tarmac with active aircraft driving around on it, but, you know, our CN workers are actively walking around with trains moving around that, quite honestly, just like a jet engine on a plane, could kill them, Mr. Speaker. It's unfortunate: such a great piece of legislation coming forward to help workers, yet some decisions by the government are being counterproductive to that.

I also noticed the one comment you made around how workers are our greatest asset, and I couldn't agree more with that statement. But then I see, unfortunately, again, decisions. You know, we're taking away overtime pay potentially to workers who earned it deservedly. We're potentially pulling back on holiday pay, which is counterproductive to our greatest assets to businesses. Again, in my time back in labour, your business probably would have been one of the ones that I would have promoted as the way to do it. You were the example of how well you looked after your employees.

3:10

You'd also mentioned around accountability. Again, a great piece of legislation, you know, talking about how we need to be accountable to our workers. Decisions around, you know, firing the Election Commissioner potentially removes that kind of accountability. So in a way I really feel for the Member for Livingstone-Macleod, who has these types of legislation pieces coming forward, which is counterproductive to the spirit in which he is bringing this legislation forward.

You know, when we talk about standing up for ordinary working Albertans, making sure they're protected, we see \$4.7 billion corporate handouts for companies like Walmart. Again, a little bit counterproductive. Of course, we heard a little bit earlier, you know, around that figure. I guess I'll just remind everybody that it's on page 144 of the budget.

I think that when we're crafting legislation, Mr. Speaker, we always have to look at how workers fit into that because Alberta workers build this province – they're currently building it – and I think government needs to do more to respect that. Bill 206

certainly, absolutely does that. It's unfortunate that we actually have to enshrine in legislation that they even have to go to court at all. It should just absolutely happen, especially when they get a judgment in their favour. But to just simply delay it because that just seems to be the easiest thing to do – again, WCB was never meant as an adversarial system. It was supposed to be there as a safety net for workers that get injured.

I just struggle, Mr. Speaker. Seeing such a great piece of legislation brought forward like this to close an unfortunate loophole, again, sometimes it takes something to happen before we realize that there might be a little bit of a hole that needs to be plugged up. But I'm seeing pieces of legislation that are just completely counterproductive to this: a youth minimum wage for people just because they're not 18 years old. That's very counterproductive to workers. You know, we see other things like maybe potentially studying the minimum wage as a whole and considering bringing back a liquor server wage, which is, again, counterproductive to the well-being of workers here in the province of Alberta, which, of course, primarily will affect women in that industry. Again, I can't commend, you know, this legislation enough around standing up for workers, but I see legislation that's counterproductive to that, which is trying to actually drag them down and bring them backwards.

I know there'll be others that want to get up and share their support for this legislation, Mr. Speaker, and I do look forward to getting the chance to talk about this more later on. I will support this legislation wholeheartedly, and I would certainly encourage all members of this Assembly to support this legislation as well.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other hon. members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright has risen to speak.

Mr. Rowswell: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to rise to discuss Bill 206, presented by my friend and colleague from Livingstone-Macleod. This legislation will ensure that Albertans who have been through the rigorous process of appealing a wrongfully refused Workers' Compensation Board claim are not put under further stress by being subject to additional costs when asking the Court of Queen's Bench for assistance in receiving the compensation. In these cases the individuals undergoing the stressful process have already been subject to workplace injury, undergone the disappointment of their claim being refused prior to undergoing the process of appealing that claim. At the very least I think it's only proper for WCB to provide them with the compensation they are owed within 30 days of being advised to do so.

Mr. Speaker, the injured person is not alone in being penalized in this situation. Clearly, this process is unfair and discouraging to the injured worker, but the process can also put strain on the employers. This lengthy appeal process and the uncertainty, whether the WCB will provide compensation within the 30-day time frame granted, can also leave employers unsure about the future of their employees, and in the cases involving small businesses with a few employees, they may be left unsure about the future viability of their business. While the legislation, Bill 206, would help to provide the certainty that business owners and employers need, the real purpose of the legislation is to protect the injured individuals, individuals whose families are relying on them. These people have been working hard for their families, and in some cases the appeal process has left them without resources to support their families.

At this point their next course of action is to appeal to the Court of Queen's Bench for a court order. The proposed legislation would

ensure that workers who follow through with this process would be remunerated for their legal costs following obtaining an order. If this legislation is passed, my hope would be that the WCB would manage to implement more if not all of the advised compensations within a 30-day time frame. Their incentive will be to avoid being held accountable for additional court costs.

This is a modest proposal. The cost impact of this isn't large as, in truth, there are not many cases brought to the Court of Queen's Bench. But, Mr. Speaker, for the families who do have to take this step, the costs associated are significant. In some cases workers have had to wait for 90 days after the Appeals Commission rendered their decision advising that the claim should be compensated. That's 90 days of potential financial hardship, 90 days of not knowing how and if they're going to pay their bills or perhaps put food on the table. To add insult to injury, literally, they will likely incur additional fees if they choose to pursue a court order. This is unacceptable.

Although this bill is unlikely to affect many of the people here in this Assembly today, we need to stand up for the individuals who at a low ebb find it difficult to stand up for themselves. Accidental injury in the workplace could happen to anyone. No family is prepared for this to occur. The WCB is an important service legislated to protect Albertans sustaining an injury in the course of working to earn a living.

The value of this program must not be taken for granted. The WCB fulfills a valuable social function. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, it's disappointing that the WCB on occasion appears to not meet fully the expectations we place upon them. These people deserve to be dealt with in a timely and fair manner. They do not need financial or bureaucratic issues adding to the physical problems that they're already dealing with.

When I first heard about this situation, I found it hard to comprehend. How is it that a public body like the Workers' Compensation Board, when advised by another public body such as the Appeals Commission that they owe money and should within 30 days pay, is unable to comply? This is a flaw in our bureaucracy which can have a deleterious impact on families.

If we look to our colleagues in Ottawa, the federal government has a similar issue in their Department of Public Services and Procurement. This issue can be summed up in one word, Phoenix. Many have heard about the Phoenix pay system, which has created a poor reputation for itself by persistently paying federal government employees incorrectly, neglecting to distribute pension and vacation pay, and failing on a number of other administrative fronts, impacting negatively on people. Like Phoenix, the current system of appeals deemed successful by the Appeals Commission has failed Albertans. These government agencies are withholding money from hard-working Canadians, releasing it to them at a leisurely pace of their choosing.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that neither the employees at the WCB nor those at Phoenix are doing this maliciously. We all experience problems created by system errors, as in the case of Phoenix. However, in this case we're not dealing with a system error. This is something our government can regulate, and I believe we owe it to Albertans to do so.

So, Mr. Speaker, I stand today to invite all colleagues in the House to support my colleague's bill. I invite you to support both the workers and the employers who face difficulty in these rare but nonetheless disappointing circumstances. If this legislation moves forward, my hope is that all deserving workers will be compensated fairly and in a timely manner with the compensation they truly deserve and are entitled to.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:20

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any others? I believe I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods has risen to speak.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise to speak to Bill 206, Workers' Compensation (Enforcement of Decisions) Amendment Act, 2019. Over the last several years the operation of the workers' compensation system and ensuring that there is fair and adequate compensation for injured workers as well as support for an overall sustainable system has been very, very important to me and to the work that was done under the previous government in completing the first comprehensive review of the workers' compensation system in 15 years.

Through that work, the review that was undertaken, to my knowledge there was a very in-depth consultation process where workers were able to come to in-person sessions. As well, we received over 1,700 online submissions. The issue with workers not receiving payments that had been ordered by the Appeals Commission did not make it into the report and into the work that we did. Bill 206 is a bill that I will give my support to. As the member who has moved second reading spoke to, it reaffirms the rights of the claimant, potentially closing a gap here, and adds something that I agree with, which is simply that if an applicant is incurring costs to get the compensation that was ordered for them, there should be a clear opportunity for the courts to award those costs, because the family that is fighting for adequate compensation should not be the ones paying for that fight that they are having.

That being said, Mr. Speaker, I think Bill 206 really reinforces, to me, something that I know. Our workers' compensation system is incredibly important. Albertans, both workers and employers, place a very high value on this system, and we've heard that from the speakers who've spoken already today. We know that the WCB covers, when I last looked at the numbers, nearly 2 million workers here in the province and over 160,000 employers. Both workers and employers rely on this system, that was based on a historic compromise to make sure that there's fair and adequate compensation, that should be delivered in a timely way. The timely compensation when there is an appeals award is what Bill 206 ties into.

Now, I do want to emphasize that through the very large consultation that we undertook, we heard many, many times about the vast majority of claims being handled well by the system and usually being resolved within a couple of weeks. But we also know that when claims start to get complicated, when there is something that isn't straightforward, because worker injuries can have multiple factors playing into them, that's when we start to see parts of the system break down. The consequences for workers not getting fair compensation and the consequences for employers who have workers out on injury who are not able to get the rehabilitation they need to get back to work can be quite devastating. It can be very, very life impacting if the WCB system is not assisting people as best as it possibly can. That was one of the reasons why we revised the workers' compensation legislation, the system.

More importantly, Mr. Speaker, I was very proud of some of the changes, things like establishing the Fair Practices office to help Albertans navigate, to provide resources and support to workers and employers using the system, addressing part of the concern around how complex WCB can be. Some of those changes were great. I think we were able to identify and resolve some major issues with the system, but the thing that I think is even more important is that we actually put into the Workers' Compensation Act a review of the act, where we will not let 15 years elapse without a thorough

review of something that is so critical to both workers and employers in the system.

Right now in the WCB act it says that on or before February 1, 2021 – so, likely, our minister of labour is already starting to hear about this from the department as they put together timelines and plans for what the next review might look like – the WCB act needs to be reviewed by a panel of experts representative of worker interests and employer interests and then every five years thereafter. This first review, mandated by the legislation, is happening at a little bit of a faster pace because, of course, we want to check in on the system and all of the systems that have been touched by the work that our government did to do things like implement the Fair Practices office; establish the code of rights and conduct; change supports and improve supports for young workers, who can often have very, very negative, life-changing impacts when they incur an injury when they're just starting out in their career; and improve the benefits for surviving spouses and children.

All that said, Mr. Speaker, I think the workers' compensation system is incredibly important to workers and employers. I think that it can and often works very well. When it doesn't, we need to address that because of the huge negative impacts that that has on both workers and their families as well as the employers, who genuinely want to see their workers rehabilitated, supported, and returned to the workplace whenever possible. In Bill 206 the reaffirmation of rights of the claimant – I will be supporting Bill 206, and I hope that through the work mandated by the legislation, this government will undertake to continue to review and improve the workers' compensation system and that this important system will be there to support all of Alberta's workers.

In my opinion, I will just mention, that should include workers who work in farming and agricultural industries. I think that will be something we debate under other pieces of legislation, but in this case I will support Bill 206, this clarification and this amendment act, and will thank the MLA for bringing it forward to make sure that workers are getting the compensation that has been deemed appropriate and ordered for them in a timely way.

Thank you for this opportunity to respond to Bill 206.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other hon. members looking to join the debate? I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East has risen to speak.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to stand in this House today and voice my support for Bill 206, brought forward by the Member for Livingstone-Macleod. Workplace accidents are stressful and difficult to manage regardless of the type of injury or incident. The pain and stress of these incidents often extend far beyond the initial occurrence and can have a lifetime of consequences for those that are injured. The last thing that someone working their way through the workers' compensation process needs to be dealing with is an unnecessarily long and tedious route to receiving the compensation they have proven to need from the WCB. Those that follow the due process, ensure the accuracy and thorough completion of their claim, do not deserve to be additionally hindered by arduous disbursement processing times.

There are several examples we can point to throughout our country of how negatively long disbursement processing times impact individuals and their families. One stands out to me in particular. Not too long ago we witnessed the hardships that the federal government's Phoenix pay system caused for employees paid through that process. Under the Phoenix pay system federal public employees were experiencing delays in pay, overpayment and underpayment, and this wasn't just a select few. It impacted many federal public service workers and negatively impacted their

families in a demonstrable way. Families couldn't put food on the table or keep the power on without a consistent paycheque. In some cases questions of foreclosure and eviction were raised.

We cannot allow space for similar occurrences to happen in our province. Granted, I consider this example to be a worst-case scenario, but the undue stresses of having questions and vague areas when it comes to receiving remuneration are visible here. More than that, it seems fairly obvious to me that an increasing waiting period for compensation would be detrimental to anyone or their family. Getting behind on bills often leaves families in a hole that can take months or even years to climb out of. It is simply not enough to tell those who are waiting for compensation to just keep waiting.

3:30

The rest of the world keeps going if you're not ready for it, Mr. Speaker. It's not like any of us can politely ask the bank to please wait a few more weeks until we get our mortgage payment to them. Albertans who are hurt shouldn't be left in the dark or left hoping for disbursement. This is a process that should be clear and without any guesswork or hope involved. When it comes to remuneration, a few days late is often too late for many, let alone weeks beyond that. The data speaks for itself here. The change proposed in this bill will only affect a handful of individuals as 97 per cent of WCB claims are not appealed and are paid out on time according to what's set out. But those that are not living in this 97 per cent need to be noticed and addressed as well. Of those that appealed their WCB ruling, 67 per cent of decisions made by the Appeals Commission were implemented on time, with those individuals seeing disbursement on schedule.

There is, then, still a relevant proportion of individuals who are not seeing disbursement in the time that they need. We have an opportunity through this bill to become the first jurisdiction to legislate a time limit on when these decisions must be implemented by. This bill is not creating red tape or providing the opportunity for future burdening through the introduction of such a change; instead, it is providing a concrete and viable solution to the issues that injured Albertans face when receiving the remuneration that they are duly entitled to. When an injured worker goes through the tedious appeals process and wins, they have fought for longer than required to justify their disbursement. It doesn't make sense to allow these processes to drag out for an individual to receive what they have proven they are entitled to.

There are many negative assumptions and stereotypes discussed when a worker is injured on the job and must go to WCB for help. The system isn't meant to be adversarial and isn't meant to be an added stress on workers who are already facing struggles from their injuries that may likely impact their careers and their lives. It is wholly unfortunate that when these Albertans are needing aid, they are meeting roadblocks and red tape instead. These are Albertans who have fought and proven that they require more assistance than initially assessed. For many, filing a WCB claim is a first step in a long journey of healing and reintegration. When injured in the workplace, there is enough stress and panic inherent in these incidents. We do not need to add to these stressors by allowing their compensation to be an unpredictable variable.

Therefore, I am proud to speak in support of this bill. I urge my colleagues to consider supporting it as well as it is one piece of holding WCB to account as we set a new standard of excellence. We have an opportunity to trail-blaze in this area and help this small sector of injured Albertans who need our assistance the most when navigating through this process.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, are there any wishing to speak on this matter? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has risen.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's an honour to rise today on Bill 206, Workers' Compensation (Enforcement of Decisions) Amendment Act, 2019. This bill, as we've heard from some of the speakers today, ensures that the Workers' Compensation Board is accountable to complaints.

I've risen in this House multiple times to stand in support of workers' rights, and I will always stand in support of workers' rights and working people. We've heard from countless working Albertans over the last little while. In particular, I've heard from a lot of folks on some of the previous legislation wherein their rights were being attacked, whether it was pensions, whether it was their constitutional right to collectively bargain, the list goes on. This bill aims to address a challenge, but I would argue that it really doesn't make up for a lot of the attacks that we've seen on workers.

While I support this bill, I find it troubling that this government continues to sort of pick and choose when they're in support of workers. I'm not talking about a small segment of the population; I'm talking about tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of Albertans, the same workers who built and are building this province. Like I said, I've heard from a lot of them, and not just constituents in the beautiful riding of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood but across the province. Some of my hon. colleagues have risen today and tabled the piles and piles of letters that they've received from teachers and nurses and others. Again, I just really want to point out that I'd ask this government to think about the many conflicting messages that they're sending to workers of this province.

Now, one of the things that I also want to highlight is the fact that I'm so proud of the work that our NDP government did to ensure worker safety. In fact, the previous speaker from our side, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, did an incredible job as our Minister of Labour. One of the things that she did was that she brought in An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans, the point of which was to improve workplace health and safety and provide compensation and meaningful support to injured workers and their families. The point in doing so was to ensure that workers would have the same protections as other Canadians. I appreciated them, and I quote what she said. This was in 2017, and I can provide it to *Hansard*. She said:

Every Albertan should be able to go to work and come home healthy and safe at the end of the workday. When they don't, they deserve to have access to the medical and financial supports they need to get healthy, care for their families and return to work.

This bill would better protect hardworking Albertans and provide fair compensation to Albertans injured on the job.

I so much appreciated the work that that hon. member did to ensure worker safety. She didn't just focus on one aspect of workers, such as worker safety; she focused on increasing the minimum wage; she focused on ensuring that workers would be fairly compensated for overtime, for instance.

As I said, while I support this – and I've heard actually from folks in my own constituency about their concerns around WCB, and we know that there are a number of stories that have come forward about concerns around workers' compensation – I just wanted to get it on the record that I really want to urge this government to think about the message they're sending to Alberta's workers: while on one hand we want to support their health and safety, on the other hand we're attacking pensions; we're decreasing the minimum wage, cutting overtime. We're trying to bring in American-style labour laws to Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other hon. members looking to speak to this matter? I see the hon. Member for St. Albert has decided to rise.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 206, Workers' Compensation Act (Enforcement of Decisions) Amendment Act, 2019. Just to sort of echo some of the comments of my colleagues, it's my understanding that the bill ensures that WCB is accountable to complainants. Of course, I will always stand in support of workers' rights, as will my colleagues.

I think we can expand that a little bit to say that we'll always stand in support of ordinary working people. Although I do appreciate that this particular bill looks at perhaps a weakness in the system or a piece of the system that really has the potential to harm people in terms of their well-being and their family's well-being – you know, I guess that's the point of legislation like this: when you find loopholes or difficulties, you fix them through legislation when you have the ability to do so.

While I appreciate this effort and I appreciate that it is important to deal with the issues that the member opposite has identified through his constituency work or his outreach, I think it's really important to back up a little bit and look at the larger problem. Unfortunately, some people don't get to this place and won't be able to use this piece of legislation. I think that it's really disingenuous, I guess, for me to even talk about this and say why it's a good idea when you back up and look at the larger problem around worker safety and around WCB.

3:40

Of course, like most of us do in this place, I think that we use the lens of what is familiar to us to try to understand sort of the implications of legislation or the implications of legislation that's missing or pieces that are missing, so I'm going to use the lens of disability workers. I would like to say that it is one thing to protect the rights of people who've been injured and who have gone through due process and have gone through all of the stages that they need to, but it's quite another to not do your part to prevent these problems from happening. I'm actually a firm believer in prevention. Certainly, you need to have the safeties in place after the fact, but I'm a firm believer in prevention in that if we can prevent some of these things from happening, perhaps one day we won't need any kind of legislation like this. Who knows?

I did want to talk about disability workers. I think that it's important for the government to understand that some of the things they've done in the very short time that they've been in power do have the ability to harm workers. They might not harm them this week, but there is a potential for great harm to happen. For those of you that don't know, disability workers are highly underpaid, in my opinion. Actually, I think that they provide one of the most important and vital services to Albertans. They work with young people with disabilities. They work with youth with disabilities. And by disabilities I don't just mean developmental disabilities or somebody with, let's say, Down syndrome. I'm talking about perhaps someone that's been diagnosed with FASD, somebody who is on the autism spectrum, somebody that might have behavioural difficulties. They provide essential services that allow people to live in their community, to live as independently as possible, hopefully to go on to postsecondary education and inclusive employment. The problem is that when you erode the funding or the support for these particular workers, if you erode, let's say, the minimum wage of these workers or you erode the earning capacity around overtime of these workers or if you cut funding to individual contracts for these workers, you create an environment that is actually quite dangerous.

I'm sure that most of you know or have heard of – I'm sure it's been in the news. Actually, there's one that's been in the news quite recently of a woman who was supporting somebody with quite challenging behaviours. And I'd like to add a note that during my time as a disability worker I supported a number of people with very, very complex disabilities who perhaps had the ability to be aggressive. But when you properly train staff and you train them around safety and you train them around how to de-escalate a nonviolent crisis intervention – of course, you have to train them around first aid as well. But when you train people properly, you put in the time and put in the money to train people properly, and you staff these individuals properly. Sometimes that requires, you know, not having just one person there with them. When you train disability workers properly, you allow them to maybe focus on one job.

You may not know this, but a lot of community disability workers have to work more than one job to be able to support their family. So very often you will have somebody show up for a shift who has already done maybe an overnight shift that was supposed to be a sleep shift, but they were unable to sleep because somebody that they were supporting was having difficulty.

You can see that all of these things are risk factors, and if indeed you want to prevent a WCB claim or an injury or a fatality, these are the things that you have to do. You have to invest in prevention.

For anybody that's interested – I could tell that there are people just riveted right now – there was a case in 2011, I believe, and it was a woman from Camrose. I believe it was Valerie Wolski. Valerie Wolski was supporting a young man who was about 25 years old. It's not unusual to have smaller in stature women supporting larger men. When you're trained properly in nonviolent crisis intervention or you're not tired because you've had to work a couple of jobs or you are not always working alone because you have adequate funding, when these things are in place, tragedies like Valerie's are less likely to happen. As you may know, Valerie was, I believe, strangled and died in her workplace, which is tragic, but what's even more tragic than this is that this isn't the first time that it's happened. What's even more tragic is that it happened again quite recently in Calgary.

There was a fatality inquiry that happened after this, and there were a number of recommendations that really focused on some of the issues that I'm talking about, about the need to prevent these kinds of tragedies from happening.

I guess I continue to go back to this, that I think it is, again, wonderful using a private member's bill to close a loophole that the member identified for people going through that system, that appeal system or that judicial system. I think it's really important to back up and to look at: what are the things that we can do to prevent these injuries and these fatalities from ever happening in every sector, not just the disability sector but in construction, whatever it is?

I'd like to also, you know, focus on another area. I'm sure most members in this place have been inundated by letters from teachers. Let me first say that for the rest of my life I will be eternally grateful for the teachers that participated in raising my children, that taught them at every phase of their life, that actually created a solid foundation for them and, more than anything, inspired confidence and curiosity. I am thankful for the teachers, but I want to talk about these teachers. In the letters that I tabled earlier today, they focused on class size. What the teachers did that was really quite interesting was talk about: what were the risks associated with the increase in class size? Very often those risks focused on not being able to meet the very complex needs of the students that were joining their classrooms.

For example, with a grade 3 class – already difficult if you've ever tried to corral a bunch of grade 3 children – it's challenging.

Add to that mix more children than you anticipated, then add to that mix the loss of an educational assistant, and add to that mix a child or two with very complex learning needs or behavioural needs, and what you do is that you increase the risk of that teacher being injured. I don't just mean a physical injury. You add the risk of a really serious injury. I continue to focus on these examples because it's really important to prevent these things from ever happening. There are absolute savings in terms of cost if you are preventing this: costs to WCB, costs to the system afterwards.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other hon. members wishing to join debate on this matter?

Seeing none, should he choose to take it, the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod to close debate.

Mr. Reid: I rise and close debate on Bill 206, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 206 read a second time]

Mrs. Savage: Mr. Speaker, I rise to seek unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 8 to allow the Assembly to immediately resolve itself into Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 206, Workers' Compensation (Enforcement of Decisions) Amendment Act, 2019.

[Unanimous consent granted]

3:50 **Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I would like to call the committee to order.

**Bill 206
Workers' Compensation (Enforcement of Decisions)
Amendment Act, 2019**

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has risen to speak.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise in Committee of the Whole to speak to Bill 206, a private member's bill, Workers' Compensation (Enforcement of Decisions) Amendment Act, 2019. I had the opportunity to hear a little bit about this bill as a member of the private members' bills committee, which heard from the member sponsoring the bill, as well as had the opportunity to receive a technical briefing from the ministry of labour with respect to this bill. That was a great opportunity to hear a little bit more, and I appreciated the words from the sponsor of the bill, the Member for Livingstone-Macleod, who spoke to why he brought it forward.

I'll begin by saying that I support the idea, of course, of us as private members in this House bringing forward the concerns of our constituents. I think that's a very important and most fundamental role that we serve as representatives of our ridings. The opportunity to hear from your constituents is something I know we all take very seriously. We spend a lot of time responding to their concerns and meeting with them. Having this chance to bring forward a bill to speak to concerns that we've heard from our constituents is a very meaningful process. I know that as a new member of this Assembly myself I'm looking forward to the opportunity, when my name gets drawn, for a private member's bill and that I can bring something

forward myself. I certainly am very respectful of the chance that the Member for Livingstone-Macleod took to bring forward his constituents' concerns.

Of course, I will echo the comments from a number of my colleagues to say that, of course, I absolutely support the idea that for workers who are entering into and engaging with the Workers' Compensation Board, that process should be as simplified and easy as possible, particularly because we know that when a worker is injured on the job, it's always a very challenging time, both for the employer and the employee and the employee's family as well. So in resolving those matters and moving forward quickly and seeking to address as timely as possible the injury that the worker suffered – and we know that in seeking supports from appropriate health care professionals to get back to work, because everybody wants to get back to meaningful work, it's in the best interests of all that that happens as quickly as possible – I certainly support the process or any measure that would certainly expedite the workers' compensation process, because we know it is a process that has historically been very challenging for both workers and employers.

I commend the work that my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods did, when she was the former minister of labour, to really make some substantive changes to the Workers' Compensation Act with those objectives in mind, of seeking to protect those employees but also the employers so that everybody can get back to work. I really respected the very meaningful engagement and review that the member did, when she was the minister of labour, to engage with all stakeholders who are invested in the process to find ways to improve that. You know, Bill 30, which was a former bill brought forward by the former minister of labour, went a long way to addressing a lot of those concerns. Certainly, again, I speak to the value of improving the process.

I will say that I do have a bit of a hesitation with Bill 206, only because I take to heart some of the comments from the technical briefing that we received from the ministry of labour when we were in the private members' bills committee. In that briefing the representative from the ministry of labour did go through and talk about what was currently in the Workers' Compensation Act, and in particular he pointed to section 13.3(2) of that act, which speaks to the implementation by the Workers' Compensation Board of a decision from the Appeals Commission. Actually, built right into the existing Workers' Compensation Act in 13.3(2)(b) – and I am a lawyer, so I like to talk about the subclauses of sections – it does actually already prescribe a 30-day timeline for the implementation of a decision of the Appeals Commission. That's currently already in the act, so while I support the bill and what it's bringing forward, I will say that I'm not certain that it is achieving the objective that was originally laid out by the sponsor of the bill, which was to implement Appeals Commission decisions in a timely fashion, only because it appears that the act already has that provision.

In fact, the representative from the ministry of labour gave a great overview – unfortunately, I can't recall the statistics at this time – about how many of those Appeals Commission decisions are implemented within the 30-day timeline that's set out already in the act. I only speak to this because I have a bit of a hesitation around making changes to legislation where those changes are actually not completely necessary. In this case it does say that the existing act already requires the Appeals Commission to implement decisions within 30 days or within the prescribed timeline limits that are set out within the decision of the Appeals Commission on a matter before them.

What I see Bill 206 doing is not actually implementing that 30-day timeline, but in looking at the specific provisions of Bill 206, it says that if the board has not implemented the decision within 30 days, that person may then seek an order from the Court of Queen's

Bench to implement the decision. It doesn't actually introduce a 30-day time limit. That actually already exists in the act. What it does say is that if the board does not implement the Appeals Commission decision within 30 days, the applicant has another 30 days to go to the Court of Queen's Bench to enforce that order.

Again, for me, this is simply about: if the goal was to make sure that the Appeals Commission is implementing its orders within 30 days, that's already in the act. What Bill 206 really does is simply say that they have a right to seek an order enforcing that from the Court of Queen's Bench. It doesn't necessarily move the process forward. It simply adds another layer, within which the applicant can then make an application to the Court of Queen's Bench, which, as we know, can in and of itself be a bit of an onerous process. I do note, though, that Bill 206 also does allow that for an applicant who seeks an order enforcing that decision from the Court of Queen's Bench, the applicant may recover their solicitor-client costs. Again, that's a notable thing, because we do know that it is a great burden for an injured worker to take on to then have to continue to advocate for themselves. They often do retain legal counsel, so to be able to recover those costs is an important element to that.

I do support this bill, but what I do see is that I'm not sure it's achieving the objectives the sponsor had in mind. It does still send a message – and I think that that perhaps is the greater objective of Bill 206 – which is that decisions of the Appeals Commission should be implemented in a timely fashion and that it is important to that worker, to that employee that that takes place. Certainly, I think that's a valuable message. I'm not sure that the content of the bill changes the process as much as we would like to hope or believe that it would, but certainly I am proud to consistently stand up in this House and advocate on behalf of workers and employees.

While I commend the sponsor of the bill, the Member for Livingstone-Macleod, for bringing this forward, particularly because it is in the best interests of injured workers, I have to echo the comments of my colleagues on this side of the House, which is to say that we have seen already in the short time of this 30th Legislature a number of attacks on workers. We've seen attacks on their overtime pay. We've seen attacks on the minimum wage. We know that there is a review of the minimum wage going on for serving staff in restaurants, and we know that that's probably coming as well, because, quite frankly, a number of these review panels that have been established by the government have predetermined outcomes. We all know what's going to happen.

4:00

We've seen the attacks on minimum wage employees. We've seen the attacks on overtime. We've seen the complete attack on workers' pensions. Without consultation, without a mandate, this government has transferred their pensions. While I will continue to stand up – I'm proud to see that my colleagues are of course also going to stand up for workers' rights, and I'm happy to see a member from the government side stand up and seek the protection for workers in this specific way – I really think that this government has a bit of a credibility issue when it comes to standing up for workers' rights because we've seen an unmitigated attack on workers' rights so far.

This is a small change. I go back to the fact that I'm not even sure it's a necessary change or that it's going to achieve the objectives set out by the member. Really, if the government and the members of the government caucus want to have some credibility and actually stand up for workers' rights, they should rethink a lot of the decisions that have already been made by this government. Perhaps they have an opportunity going forward to amend some of the things that they have done already to attack workers' rights.

So while I will support Bill 206, it is certainly not an endorsement of the government's approach to workers thus far. I'm proud that we will continue to stand up for workers' rights on this side of the House.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members looking to speak on this matter?

Then I am prepared to call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 206 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed? All those in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Chair: Any opposed, please say no. That is carried.

Mrs. Savage: I move that we rise and report Bill 206.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

Mr. Hanson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 206.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report? All those in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. Carried.

Motions Other than Government Motions

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika has risen to speak.

Economic Diversification in Rural Alberta

510. Mr. Schow moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to identify and eliminate red tape that prevents innovative private-sector economic diversification in rural Alberta's communities for the economic benefit of these communities and Alberta as a whole.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today. I'm pleased to rise and move Motion 510. Now, this motion is important to draw attention to rural Alberta. As many of you know, 41 seats in this Chamber are considered to be rural Alberta seats, seats that are representing areas that are not part of our major city centres, you know, places where agriculture is our main economic driver and where people toil outside for hours at a time. They're the kind of people who shower after work, not before work. Some of these men and women are the backbone of Alberta. They're the people that I'm proud to represent in Cardston-Siksika.

I wanted to start with a bit of a story about one such type of business. I live in Cardston, Mr. Speaker, as you know. It's a beautiful place to be. You should come visit some time. I highly recommend it. I think you'd love the view, especially of Chief

Mountain. In Cardston there is this clothing store. It's called Atkins, and Atkins can be traced back to 1893, at the time of the arrival of the Card family. Now, when the Card family came – as you can imagine: Cardston, Card – they came with a shoemaker, and that shoemaker ended up leaving. They needed one, so they sent off for Frederick Walter Atkins and offered him \$16 to come to Cardston and make shoes.

He was making shoes and making boots for the mountains, and he travelled, as I understand it, by horse to Cardston. Later, in 1947, his son Henry Harwood Atkins constructed the building that is the current location of Atkins. He built this building, and it still stands today as a staple of the community of Cardston. Later on Bert and Shirley Gibb took over in the 1960s. They held this business in their care and maintained it for years, until 1997, when their daughter Kris MacDonnell took over the business.

This is an example of a southern Alberta success story, the way that businesses can thrive and they can succeed in what others might consider to be difficult economic or climatic, you know, parts of the province. I know that people don't come to Alberta necessarily for the weather but for the opportunity, and they make the most of it.

When I was talking to Kris MacDonnell about Atkins, she said that one of the greatest pieces of advice she had ever heard was something that her grandfather said to her dad. As you can imagine, through the over a hundred years of its history Atkins has gone through some difficult times, times when, you know, they could have considered closing their doors because maybe it just wasn't going quite as well as they would have liked it to. He said: "When you owe people money, send them bits of money over time. Don't just disappear on them. Maintain a relationship with those you owe money to even if it's just a little bit. That will improve your credit and your credibility with those you owe money to and show good faith to the people that you do business with." Now, it's my belief that the people in Cardston-Siksika in general all operate in good faith, and I think this lesson is a great example of that.

The point here is that there are lots of opportunities that aren't being realized in Cardston-Siksika and, I believe, across the province, and that is why I think that we need to look at opportunities to remove red tape, Mr. Speaker, to remove barriers that hold back these businesses, some of the great ideas that could be fostered right here in Alberta. It's no secret that Alberta is heavily dependent upon our oil and gas sector, the most ethical oil and gas sector, I think, around the world. It's a world-class product that we should be getting to market, but we're having a difficult time there. While that's happening, I think that there are opportunities here, and we should be exploring those.

So I was pleased during the campaign when I heard our Premier talk a lot about getting rid of the barriers that are standing in the way, this red tape, and setting up an Associate Ministry of Red Tape Reduction, something that my colleague to the left here is working tirelessly to execute. Mr. Speaker, the saddest thing in life is wasted potential, and while that is a quote from one of my favourite movies, it is the truth not only in life but also in business. Are we realizing our potential in rural Alberta? I think that there are opportunities there that we're not quite exploring.

I want to talk about one of those opportunities that comes to my office, comes to my attention quite often, and it is the fact that in Alberta we have only one border crossing that's open 24 hours a day – it's in Coutts – whereas just south of Cardston we have a border crossing that closes at about 11 o'clock. This poses a bit of a problem, a bit of a barrier for those who live in the area. Cardston has just a wealth of history. There's so much to offer in Cardston and southern Alberta in general. Those coming to southern Alberta might have a bit of a concern about the ability to get home at the

end of an evening if they stay a little bit late. They're always checking their watches.

One opportunity – and I know it's not entirely within our control – is to look at an option of supporting a 24-hour border crossing at Carway. Carway is only 20 minutes from Glacier national park in the United States. This is a park that sees between 3 million and 3 and a half million visitors each year. It's also not far, again, like I said, 20 minutes from us. So, you know, if you want to come across the border into Canada, you can do that, but if you want to stay, there might be the concern of not getting home in time. Going to visit places like Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump or plays in Cardston or visit the Remington Carriage Museum or Writing-On-Stone or beautiful Waterton is another reason, Mr. Speaker, that you should most certainly – and I encourage everyone else in this Chamber – come down to Cardston. If you have not been to Waterton, you are sure missing out on a real treat.

4:10

Another part here is the reality that there is a lot of truck traffic that comes through southern Alberta and goes through Coutts, and that truck traffic, if they're not going to make it through the border, is going to be diverted all the way through Coutts. That's an extra hour on your drive time when you could be going straight through Carway as opposed to going to Coutts. When you think about trucking, as someone who did drive a truck for a while in a previous career, time is money, Mr. Speaker. Time is money. Tick-tock. I'll tell you that it's important we save money where possible. That's an opportunity to look at.

This red tape reduction is so important because there are so many people who are looking at Alberta as this beacon of hope and opportunity, this place where you can come and start something fantastic, something you can be excited about, something that I'm excited about. But what's in the way? Oftentimes, red tape and bureaucracy.

To use a bit of an example about how that gets in the way, growing up in the rural part of the country, my friends and I got our hands on a mid-90s Honda Accord. It was a manual transmission. That's when I learned how to drive a manual. This was long before I turned 16. We would drive this car – not on the road, of course, Mr. Speaker; that would be illegal – in the field. It was a field car. Driving it around – we were getting used to driving a manual stick shift there – we noticed that between two of the fields, as they connected, there was a bit of an incline. It was a bit of a bumpy ride as you went over it, and I thought: well, what if you go a little faster; what would happen?

You can imagine that if you go a little faster, maybe the front tires come off the ground. Naturally, we began to explore this more, with seat belts on of course, and realized that there was a real opportunity to jump this car and really catch some serious air in this field car of ours. It just weighed a lot. Between the passengers and everything in the vehicle, it was really hard to maximize that air time, that hang time, in this vehicle. But as we started jumping it more and more, we realized that parts started falling off. As the parts fell off, we reduced the weight. As we reduced the weight, we got more hang time. It was a nice little cause and effect there.

So we got to thinking: what else can we take off this vehicle? We parked this thing in my garage, and we went to work on it. We started taking out the spare tire. We took out any other unnecessary weight, even parts of the exhaust pipe. We took out some of it; other parts of it just fell off, bumpers, Mr. Speaker. Now, these are all integral pieces for the road, but if you're trying to get maximum hang time in this field car, you've got to take them off. We did just that, and lo and behold you get going at about 90 kilometres and hit this incline and – bam – air time like you wouldn't believe.

Now, I relate this back to the point that I'm trying to make here: what's holding Alberta back? What's holding Alberta back from getting that maximum hang time, all that potential? I'll tell you what it is. It's red tape and regulation, and I encourage us to get rid of it.

Well, that's all my remarks.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members looking to join the debate on this? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore has risen to speak.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate your recognizing me. I was listening intently to the story there, and I must admit, Member, that I'm glad you didn't remove the seat belts. We don't even want to think about what might have happened with that.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, I rise this afternoon on private member's Motion 510, which, of course, says:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to identify and eliminate red tape that prevents innovative private-sector economic diversification in rural Alberta's communities for the economic benefit of these communities and Alberta as a whole.

I have to say that I rise at this moment with a bit of confusion, to say the least. I just talked about some of these things in the last discussion on a bill. I've talked about these things in previous bills where we see something being brought forward in terms of legislation, but the actions and the bills that we've brought forward previously are counterproductive to that.

When we're talking about trying to create an atmosphere for innovative private-sector economic diversification, I would of course be remiss – the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview would want me to mention these things. Cancelling things like the capital investment tax credit, cancelling things like the AITC and the digital media tax credit: these were things that were going to allow small and medium-sized businesses to be innovative, to be able to grow. When we take these things away, it's counterproductive to what we're asking to do right here in this motion.

I guess I'm looking at the Member for Cardston-Siksika. He's trying to, you know, work hard for the businesses that call his area home, allowing them to grow, to prosper, to be able to create jobs, hire more people, grow their businesses. Yet we see things going on within the government that are counterproductive and that are actually hurting your businesses and their ability to be able to grow. We've heard comments, like from the Finance minister, that these types of economic diversification are just a long-term luxury. I would highly disagree. I think your businesses trying to grow, create jobs, and be prosperous is not a luxury. I think it's a necessity. That kind of a comment is counterproductive to how we can move these things forward.

Of course, you were talking about red tape, and the government did create an Associate Ministry of Red Tape Reduction. That is going to cost Albertans over the next four years \$10 million. We've seen the government moving, cancelling, you know, things like the Election Commissioner because that's going to help save us a million dollars, yet what I've found, Mr. Speaker, during estimates when I was talking to Treasury Board and Finance, when I was talking to Municipal Affairs, when I was talking to Labour – I've seen other critics when they were talking to their ministries – is that there are clearly red tape reduction strategies going on within those ministries that didn't need the help of the red tape reduction ministry. Right there, just in terms of efficiencies, I think we could maybe take that \$10 million that we're going to spend, and maybe we could do things that could invest in, like, Cardston-Siksika and

its businesses to allow them to grow, to be innovative, and to start playing on a larger scale or maybe even the world scale. Wouldn't that be great?

I mean, we've seen things – I'm sure that the Member for Lethbridge-East would be very, very aware of this – like Cavendish Farms, a fantastic business that wants to grow here in the province, yet we are seeing things that are working against them to be able to do that. I mean, we were talking about them investing \$360 million in the plant, \$430 million in the facility where full production capacity is going. I was astounded at this, quite honestly. I mean, processing 735 million pounds of potatoes: I can't even imagine what that looks like. That's a lot of potatoes. That is a lot of potatoes, Mr. Speaker. You know, in creating the French fries to be able to ship them around the world, what would have helped them to do that would have been things like the capital investment tax credit, like the Alberta investment tax credit. That would have helped them to be able to scale up and do those types of production levels. Again, it's counterproductive to what this motion is trying to do. It just really feels like the government is actually working against the Member for Cardston-Siksika with his motion and him trying to advocate so hard for his businesses.

4:20

You know, in terms of budget cuts, Mr. Speaker, that again are going against rural Alberta and their ability to be innovative, to be able to prosper, Agriculture and Forestry saw a budget cut of 9.1 per cent. Environment and Parks was ending the Alberta community resilience program, which provides flood and drought mitigation funding for municipalities, First Nations, Métis settlements, improvement districts, special areas. All of these things would have been able to help rural Alberta to be able to prosper, to be able to protect their investments from things like floods. We've certainly seen some of the floods in this province getting much, much worse. We've all heard that term about 1-in-100-year events. It seems like we've had three or four of those 1-in-100-year events just in the last decade alone. It's taking away those types of funding to be able to provide things like flood mitigation, which will protect the assets of rural Albertans and their businesses to be able to continue to innovate and prosper.

We've seen Transportation cutting highway funding maintenance by 25 per cent. I mean, if rural Alberta businesses are going to try to innovate and grow, create jobs, not only service Alberta but the world as a whole – I've always believed that our businesses can all work on the world stage. I've always, always believed that. But how are they going to be able to get their products to market, to that world stage, if we're cutting back on maintenance? Again, it's counterproductive to what the Member for Cardston-Siksika is trying to do, advocating hard for his businesses. The government is working against him. I'm very, very confused with regard to this.

I think that, unfortunately, because of that, it's incumbent upon the government to be able to step up, to back up the Member for Cardston-Siksika. I think we can take that \$10 million from the ministry of red tape, invest it in your businesses to be able to prosper and grow because, clearly, red tape reduction is happening within the ministries themselves. I have yet to see any red tape reductions create jobs. Well, except for one. We've created one job, probably the minister himself.

Unfortunately, I'm not prepared to be able to support this motion at this time. I do hope that the member's businesses will be backed up by maybe some different policies from this government, hopefully other investments that will allow them to prosper, but right now the indication that I'm getting from the government is that they don't care about that member's businesses. I would like to

see that \$10 million invested in your riding and your businesses and in my businesses as well in Edmonton-Decore. I'm known as the shopping district, Mr. Speaker. I have three major malls. I have so many businesses within my riding. They're fantastic. I would invite you to Edmonton-Decore as well. We've got some great restaurants. I'm sure you'd love them.

But I'm going to urge other members to not support this at this time.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak in favour of this motion and would like to just comment a little bit about the last member's speech, from Edmonton-Decore. There was a word that he used, "confused." I have to say that that is a fairly appropriate word that he used. I think that it's interesting. I see the confusion probably in that there are a few words in there that would confuse him like "innovative private-sector" jobs. Obviously, something that we've seen for the last four years from this government is that their whole strategy has been that they believe that injecting the government and the government's role into society in a free-enterprise society is actually the solution. In fact, if you read through their appendix in their constitution, you'll see that their job, they believe, is to actually micromanage and that they think that they're smarter than the economy.

What we've learned through years of trying different types of economic models is that a free economy, where it has the minimal interference by the government, is the most prosperous. This is really why I'm in favour of this motion. I think that the Member for Cardston-Siksika has gotten it bang on when it comes to the need to be able to have government get out of the way, get out of the way of our job creators and our innovators.

It always amazed me listening to the members opposite when they were in government not too long ago, Mr. Speaker, argue that they were confused why so many private-sector jobs – I think there were at one point over 180,000 private-sector jobs that had fled our markets. It confused them. They were confused because they didn't seem to understand that there is a direct relationship between the government's intervention and taking away that incentive for our job creators to actually get in and to start a business, to take on that risk. I actually do understand why the Member for Edmonton-Decore is confused, but that is actually no excuse.

The truth is that we were hired on April 16 to get Albertans back to work and to jump-start our economy. They hired us not to get in the way of our job creators and innovators but to get out of the way. I think that the member needs to realize that. I would have to say that I don't know if the member has gotten out enough and talked to our job creators and our innovators, because what he wouldn't hear from them is: "You know what? We need you to hold our hand and we need you to actually make us into this successful business." No. The number one thing that I hear, Mr. Speaker, is: "The government needs to get out of our way. The government needs to let us be so that we can actually do what we feel is the right way to be able to create wealth, to be able to start a small business, and to risk and to become an innovator and to hopefully knock it out of the park." The sky is the limit for entrepreneurs.

It's interesting, Mr. Speaker, that there are many, many immigrants that come to this province. A lot of the immigrants come to this province because they think that this is the place where they can actually make something of their lives, that, again, the sky is the limit here, that Alberta would be a place where they could come and start a business, that they can actually provide for their families better than they could where they were living. Now, when the government gets in the way and when the government, through

continual red tape, heaps on layers and layers of red tape, it takes away the incentive for those newcomers to come to this province and to try to start a business. I've said this many times in this House. Small businesses are disproportionately affected by red tape, so it's extremely important for us to be able to turn back that tide.

There's an interesting study that was done down in the States that showed that had the United States curbed red tape or regulatory increases since 1980, they would have seen an increase of almost 32 per cent in the size of their economy. An eight-tenths of a per cent increase year over year they would have seen. That's a substantial amount, Mr. Speaker. Think about the size of our economy, what we would have done had we also tried to curb this thing called red tape.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I like how the Member for Cardston-Siksika is talking about innovative private-sector economic diversification in rural Alberta. What I think is important to recognize is that, really, of our job creators and innovators in rural Alberta, a lot of them are farmers and ranchers, and we made a huge step forward – I have to take my hat off to the agriculture minister and the labour minister for being able to come together in repealing Bill 6, that devastating NDP bill that added, again, so many layers of red tape onto our rural job creators and innovators, our farmers and ranchers.

4:30

I want to tell you a story, Mr. Speaker, about how those unintended consequences have really affected a member from my constituency. I won't use names. This family has asked me not to. They're humble people, as you often find in rural Alberta. This family had a very small farm. It wasn't a big farm, but they had the option of – when Bill 6 was introduced, they didn't really know what was expected. They had to figure out whether they were going to hire another person and become completely occupational health and safety compliant or – the wife was going to be going and getting a hip replacement. Now, she could no longer help her husband on the farm, so they had to make a choice. The choice was either they hire another person to help take care of what she was normally doing or she goes and gets a hip replacement done. She had been waiting for about a year and still no hip replacement.

They did like everybody does. They just basically said: well, our option for getting a hip replacement is going to cost us X amount; our option to become occupational health and safety compliant so that we can have another person come to our farm and work is going to cost us this much. Well, Mr. Speaker, they had a consultant come in. I haven't been able to verify or validate their numbers, but they said that this consultant told them that it was going to cost them \$200,000 to bring their farm up to occupational health and safety compliance – \$200,000 – whereas they could go down to Kalispell and get a \$39,000 hip replacement done. Guess what they did? They mortgaged their house, they went down, and she got a hip replacement done in Kalispell.

What a terrible option for them, Mr. Speaker. On one hand, you're going to have to spend \$39,000; on the other hand, you're going to have spend \$200,000 because of some unintended consequences of a government that was more interested in piling on red tape than they were interested in actually helping our job creators and innovators do what they do best, create jobs. This is the reason why job creators rejected them en masse on April 16 of this year. They rejected their approach. They said: no, you do not have any interest in being able to help our job creators jump-start; you're interested in being able to maybe start increasing public-sector jobs. They did a lot of that, but they certainly were not interested in private-sector jobs.

Mr. Speaker, this is a legacy that the NDP will have to wear. The legislators opposite will have to remember that instead of them being able to actually jump-start the economy through intervention by the government, in reality they actually destroyed the economy by government intervention.

So I am all in favour of this motion. This motion speaks to a truth, which is that when the government gets out of the way of our job creators and innovators, they know best how to be able to jump-start the economy and get Albertans back to work, and that is the solution, Mr. Speaker. It's not anecdotal. It is the solution. We've seen numerous examples in different parts of the world where they've done this right. In fact, there are some studies done in Scandinavian countries that did this right and found that they can get up to a 2.3 per cent increase in GDP by just focusing on red tape reduction.

This is something that I'm very much in favour of, and I'm grateful for the member bringing it forward.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler has risen to speak.

Mr. Horner: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and speak in support of Motion 510, brought forward by the field-car-driving Member for Cardston-Siksika. I just would say that I learned to drive the same way, drive a stick, and I appreciate his analogy. As the car loses parts, you definitely get more air on the incline of opportunity, so I think it's quite fitting.

Mr. Speaker, if you ask farmers around Canada, they'll tell you that Albertan farmers are some of the luckiest in the world – maybe not this fall, though; it has been a challenging harvest – a wealth of land turned into a wealth of resources. As the subsurface of Alberta was mapped and analyzed for oil and gas, many did well by becoming partners of industry, leasing surface rights to companies that wished to further explore the subsurface or install infrastructure. Others found work and participated directly as this new economy demanded more and more labour. These jobs were high paying and easy to get.

Those days appear over for now. The easiest resources to find and to extract were targeted first, and through 2014 a high price created an opportunity for further growth in more unconventional plays such as SAGD and more marginal oil sands deposits. As the price of oil has stagnated in recent years, the jobs have dried up and the investment has fled.

This is not our province's first experience with the cyclical nature of the energy industry. Energy is a global commodity, and the price is subject to forces outside our control. This means that when the price is low, our province is hard hit. The energy industry remains the main economic driver of our province, and I'm certainly not downplaying its importance. When we discuss economic diversification, we must therefore place it in terms of supplementing the industry rather than replacing it.

Albertans' hard work exploiting our world-class energy reserves has been so successful that it shifted our entire country's economy. Mature labour markets like those of the Maritimes, where jobs were often hard to find and far lower paying on average, saw an exodus of people moving westward seeking prosperity.

The creation of economies of scale in the oil sands has incentivized companies to invent and deploy innovative technologies that have given Albertan engineers a reputation as some of the most versatile and qualified globally. While the oil sands remain innovative and productive, opportunities for rural populations to share in the prosperity have evaporated as companies have stopped drilling. They're asking for help, and they deserve it. They're not asking for a handout but a hand up.

The previous NDP government often paid lip service to diversification of the economy, but their efforts were doomed to failure. Albertans have created new industries before through hard work, innovation, and prudent governance. Burdensome taxation, overregulation, and complex red tape stand in the way of entrepreneurs and businesses from setting up operations in rural communities. Our government must be prudent and stand behind Albertans that are working to meet these ends.

The labour market has become increasingly bloated as layoffs have continued and the need for service companies dwindled. This is a highly skilled labour base that would be a tremendously valuable asset to any industries that choose to call Alberta home. I do not know the specific industry we should be courting, but what I do know is that the skills and talents of Albertans go far beyond the oil and gas industry.

Alberta has world-class business and postsecondary programs in forestry, agriculture, mining, and technology. Innovative companies like Shaw Communications, WestJet, ATCO, and Sport-Chek were all started right here in Alberta. There is no reason that we should not be fostering an environment in which small companies with big ideas can thrive. New opportunities for business in fields like ag tech, energy efficiency, cannabis, and many more must not be passed up. We as a government must be actively working to be sure that Albertan businesses are not overly constrained by red tape as they try to innovate and Alberta competes with other jurisdictions to draw in business. We have always been a province in which entrepreneurs can thrive.

Mr. Speaker, we must find a balance between diversification and a strong energy industry. The previous government could not find this balance. When the bottom fell out of the oil industry, the NDP was left with a \$6 billion hole in their budget. A diverse economy is an essential step towards smoothing the boom-and-bust cycle of the energy industry, but that does not mean we should forgo the next peak. Energy has always paid the bills in Alberta, whether privately or providing the means for expansive government services. Our province is uniquely positioned in Canada, still managing to create a sizable sovereign wealth fund as eastern provinces claimed a piece of the pie. This is a savings account for every Albertan.

Rather than raising tax rates and creating additional regulatory burden for small businesses and entrepreneurs, as our previous NDP government did, we must rely on rational decision-making to set them on the path to success. We must attract investment, both foreign and domestic, and incubate small businesses so that those who innovate can quickly scale right here in our province. It is imperative that we work to cut the red tape that has kept businesses from basing themselves in rural Alberta so that our next recession is less deep than the last.

Our government has already put forward several programs to help improve conditions in rural Alberta. The rural entrepreneur immigration program in tandem with the rural renewal program will help our province to direct skilled labour to rural communities, with the intent of starting or taking over existing businesses. We have also committed to expanding our programs which incentivize media production in rural areas, which follows the lead of Manitoba's film tax credit.

4:40

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's economy is one of the best in the world when hydrocarbon prices are high. When they are low, milk and honey are harder to find. I want a province for my kids where they have opportunities of all kinds. By the time they grow up, I'm hopeful that whatever their passion is, there will be an opportunity for them to thrive right here at home.

I have heard criticism related to Alberta pension funds that Alberta is just too small to have world-class financial services expertise. This is absolutely ridiculous, and Albertans should be livid about this patronizing attitude. We're no longer the expansive and empty prairies. It is time we built an integrated and diverse economy which reflects that. Cutting red tape on rural businesses is the first step in the right direction.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has risen to speak.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to this bill. I don't believe, in substance, that the idea of allowing economic diversification – I think that that's a very good thing. I think my main objection is that this government's approach to that has been incorrect. I mean, over a number of years it has been tried many times, to reduce the general corporate tax rate and hope that that spurs innovation, but that hasn't had that effect. The reason for that is because a corporate tax rate is paid only on profits, and in fact it's paid only on profits in excess of half a million dollars.

A lot of businesses, when they start up, are not in that position, so they need a different sort of assistance, assistance that I think the Alberta investor tax credit was providing, and I think it was doing a very good job of that. In fact, I've certainly heard from a number of individuals and from members of the legal community that they were working with companies who had planned to come here, to open offices or to open up here, who are no longer going to do that because those opportunities are no longer available to them, whereas programs like that exist in other jurisdictions.

I think that that is a huge concern because, really, the point here is to diversify the economy, to assist businesses in other areas to spring up, and I don't think that this rhetoric that the members across the way put out, that if we're in support of other industries, we can't possibly be in support of oil and gas, is correct. I think you can be in favour of both of those things at the same time. I don't think they are anything resembling mutually exclusive.

I think, you know, this idea that somehow that plan wasn't going to work: I mean, not only had it begun to work already, but it would have only increased in the future. We'll never see that now because it's been cut off. We have credible reports of all sorts of industry folks that could have come here, particularly in the tech sector, that won't be doing that now. I think that is a real shame because I think that those were good, solid, mortgage-paying jobs, which, at the end of the day, is really what we're after.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that while I'm on my feet, it's worth commenting on some of the comments made by the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction because I do think that it is possible for us to disagree in this place without becoming personal or without becoming insulting. To see that member rise in his place and suggest that when the Member for Edmonton-Decore says that he's confused about how this is supposed to work, which is a legitimate question – and he laid it out on a number of legitimate bases – that's just because he's confused about life generally is deeply inappropriate, especially coming from someone who has risen in this place and suggested that potable water is red tape, who, when asked what red tape he plans to reduce, couldn't provide a single example of a bill, couldn't provide anything resembling an operational definition, and to date hasn't provided anything resembling an operational definition.

I think that if one is confused by that, one is rightly confused by that, because it's confusing. When you say, "Oh, well, it's things

that harm business, but we won't in any way reduce it in such a way that it impacts the lives or livelihoods of Albertans," well, I mean, that's not a definition that anyone can sort of operationalize in a way that's important. Those are my comments on those comments.

You know, I think that when we're talking about attracting investment to rural Alberta, the Cavendish facility in Lethbridge is definitely worth mentioning. That was an investment that was attracted by our government. We did that by working with the folks there. They made that investment, and it will produce a lot of jobs, jobs in an area that could use jobs.

I must actually say that I met recently with the folks from Team Lethbridge. Their municipality and their businesses and their nonprofit organizations all tend to come up here together to talk to MLAs, which is actually a very effective strategy, in my view. They had some fantastic ideas having to do with economic diversification and what sectors they wanted to attract and how to attract investment from outside the province rather than attracting it from other municipalities.

I think there's a lot of good evidence that there are a lot of ways to go forward with a strategy that isn't based on trickle-down economics. Honestly, you know, we hear the members across the way saying that the problem is that we think we're smarter than the economy. I mean, setting aside for a moment the fact that an economy isn't anthropomorphic, that it's not the sort of thing that has an intelligence, I think it's entirely possible – and I do hear the member laughing. I realize he thinks it's impossible for someone like me to have something relevant to say in this place, Mr. Speaker, but fortunately we have the opportunity for all of us to debate here.

The members across the way and I have a fairly deep disagreement. We have a deep disagreement over whether trickle-down economics works, and I think there's an enormous amount of evidence on our side. I think that in the last 20 or 30 years the entire field of economics has done a lot to change from being based on theories to being based on evidence, and I think that's a really good change, a positive change in the world. I realize that the members over there appear to think that it's hilarious that anyone would think that that's a good thing, but it is a good thing.

I think that as it becomes more and more the case that economics is based on actual evidence in the world, we're seeing more and more that the trickle-down theory just doesn't work. That's not a method that's effective, and it's certainly not a method that's effective under certain circumstances. Having now dropped the corporate tax rate 1 per cent, if we continue to drop it – we're already at the bottom, so that's not going to attract any additional investment, and I think that generally that's been clear. The aim of attracting investment specifically intended to diversify our economy is a good aim. What we have seen under this new government's policies is companies taking the money and running to other jurisdictions to invest the money. I don't think that's an effective strategy, and I think that the numbers bear out my conclusion that it's not an effective strategy because all we have seen is more and more job losses under this government.

I think, Mr. Speaker, you know, that spending particularly \$10 million over the next four years on a ministry that is, in my view, redundant is probably not a really good use of taxpayer dollars, especially at a time when we're talking about cutting educational supports in classrooms, when we're talking about cutting health care funding, when we're talking about cutting funding to police. Why it is that we would be spending \$10 million on a ministry that, as far as I can tell, isn't actually doing anything is entirely beyond me.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that that will end my comments with respect to this matter. The members across the way and I are obviously going to disagree rather strongly in terms of whether economic

diversification is a priority or whether it ought to be, as they say, a long-term luxury. I don't think it's a long-term luxury. I think it's something that we have to do. I think it's something that we have to do now, and I think it's incredibly important.

Mr. Speaker, I will not be in favour of this motion, and as we move forward, I hope that we see a level of debate in this place that is perhaps a little bit more elevated. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Camrose has risen to speak.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was my pleasure to spend time over the last number of months in my constituency consulting with constituents. One of the main issues that continues to arise is the excessive red tape that is strangling our economy. This is especially true when speaking to business owners. Rural entrepreneurs face an increasing number of challenges in a rapidly changing world. On top of the struggles caused by the NDP mismanagement of Alberta's economy and those faced by urban entrepreneurs, rural business owners face declining populations, high transportation costs, and the fear of vandalism, pushed by a rural crime crisis in our province.

4:50

Mr. Speaker, in talking to my constituents, they have outlined a number of regulatory issues that hinder the success of small-town entrepreneurs. I'd like to highlight just one of them now. Interference with project management makes jobs take longer. Project management is less efficient, and it becomes harder for small businesses operating in areas with fewer customers to turn a profit. Because of this, jobs become harder to come by and families are forced to relocate to cities, further exacerbating the problems. Because of this difficulty in moving projects forward, business has left Alberta. The regulatory burdens imposed by all levels of government have led to a hurry-up-and-wait problem and a failure to guarantee anything our job creators strive for.

Maybe I'll use a large-scale familiar example to explain this problem. As I'm sure everyone in this House is aware, the Trans Mountain pipeline has struggled with moving regulatory goalposts for years. It has been approved and reapproved over and over again. Recently the Liberal government of Justin Trudeau has introduced Bill C-69, the no more pipelines law, a new framework for infrastructure projects. The issue, Mr. Speaker, is that C-69 fails to address any of the real issues and allows the goalposts to be moved indefinitely. As a result, Albertans have suffered. A failure to get this project completed has real effects on the daily lives of Albertans.

Now imagine this happening to multiple projects in rural areas. These delays all have an effect on the health of our rural communities. This is a major barrier that rural areas need to address. This isn't to say that urban areas don't also face issues with regulatory barriers placing roadblocks in the way of major infrastructure, but there is a massive difference in a delay in road construction adding a couple of minutes to a commute in comparison to a rural road adding half an hour to your drive into town. As our towns shrink, it becomes even more difficult when businesses promising employment are delayed in opening their doors by red tape and excessive regulation.

One area where we saw regulations threaten our rural areas was the imposition of the previous government's seriously flawed Bill 6. Thanks to the organization of a number of farmers the bill was significantly amended, but as I along with many of my colleagues have heard, this did not go far enough to protect our farmers from more regulation. That's why I was so glad to see the Minister of

Agriculture and Forestry bring forward Bill 26 as a replacement to ensure worker safety while also reducing the regulatory burden on family farms, who don't have the tools to navigate red tape that large corporate farms do.

As you can see, Mr. Speaker, regulations can have a devastating impact on small rural communities. This is something that our government should be taking very seriously. I'm glad that my colleague from Cardston-Siksika has brought this issue to the forefront, and I look forward to advocating for further red tape reduction in rural areas alongside him.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has risen to speak on this matter.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think I'll keep my remarks with regard to Bill 25 to the municipal affairs areas if I maybe could just ask a number of questions or concerns that have been brought forward.

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member. We are currently discussing Motion Other than Government Motion 510. If you would like to speak on that matter, please feel free.

Member Ceci: With regard to the red tape reduction . . .

The Acting Speaker: And I will also just mention to the member that in about three minutes we will have reached 55 minutes of discussion on this matter.

Member Ceci: Yeah. Okay. Thanks.

With regard to Motion 510, then, you know, red tape is certainly something that's important for all of us to address. We, of course, endeavoured as government, when we were in government, to ensure that only the regulation that was important and necessary was put into place. The fact that we're talking about red tape generally helps out other orders of government, particularly the local levels of government. When we get to Bill 25, I'll have the opportunity to address it in more detail. But, Mr. Speaker, the importance of generally addressing red tape is obviously brought forward in an actual bill that's before us, including the one that's with regard to the farm areas, farm implementation, farming.

We, of course, are getting feedback from the different organizations, RMA in particular. I've been reading their website with regard to this. They speak specifically to Bill 25. They don't talk about this motion that's before us. They do say about Bill 25 that they would like to find out more information. When we get to that, I'll talk to the associate minister.

We, of course, worked very hard to make sure that projects like the Cavendish Farms had the infrastructure in place, got that put in place as quickly as possible, so there was no real issue there.

We, of course, want to make sure that we're not standing in the way of economic diversification throughout Alberta, including the rural areas. We see a benefit to addressing red tape.

I do have many questions about the municipal affairs area and Bill 25, and I'll wait to get there for that discussion.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

About one more minute, if there are any hon. members looking to speak quickly on this matter.

Mr. Rowswell: I've got, like, 50 seconds to talk. Is that right? Okay. I'll start. Mr. Speaker, no one can deny the positive effect of our energy sector. The point I want to make is that, you know, it

sustains our province, and therefore any discussions about economic diversification must remain focused on supplementing our energy sector, not replacing it or shrinking it. We should follow the lead of the hard-working oil and gas workers and be proud of our rich energy resources, which, through the hard work of Albertans, we developed into the greatest wealth-generating asset in the country.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. Given the time I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but under Standing Order 8(3), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a motion other than a government motion to close debate, I would invite the hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika to please close debate on Motion 510.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to close debate on Motion 510. If there's one message that I can get across through the debate that we've had in the last hour, it is: don't forget about rural Alberta; don't forget about rural Alberta and the hard-working men and women who live there.

I represent one of the most southern constituencies and live in one of the most southern parts of this province, right by the U.S. border. We have so much to offer Alberta. We have so much to offer this province and this country. Any opportunity that we have to start something great: we'll snatch that opportunity, and we'll make the most of it. That's what we do in the south. While I know that the urban parts of this province play an integral part of our success and our prosperity and I'm grateful for those places – I'm grateful for Calgary and Edmonton and Red Deer and all the other major cities, Medicine Hat, where my own parents live – we cannot forget about rural Alberta.

I feel like some of these messages that have been sent are that rural isn't as important. I can't speak to the logic behind the committee that redrew the boundaries for this Chamber, but we lost four rural constituencies, Mr. Speaker. That suggests that there are four fewer voices in this Chamber on behalf of rural Alberta. For anyone living in the urban parts of this province, I encourage you, as I do all the time when I stand up and speak on behalf of my constituents, to step out of the urban bubble. Step out of that bubble, and come visit for an extended period of time rural Alberta, and see the kind of men and women and the families we're raising and the way that we do business out there. Then you'll recognize why we advocate so hard for what rural Alberta has to offer this province.

5:00

You know, we talked a great deal though the campaign and even in this Chamber now, with all the things that were passed in legislation, about how important it is to support small businesses and the agriculture industry out in these rural parts. We promised that we would cut taxes on small businesses, and we've done that

with our job-creation tax cut, that will result in a sustainable growth and diversification of this economy.

One piece of red tape in other provinces that we've seen that drew people to Alberta was that medical professionals could incorporate here in Alberta. A number of people have come from other jurisdictions to Alberta because it's a more favourable place to do business.

Now, like the member who just previously spoke said, you know, we don't want to replace our oil and gas industry, but we'd like to supplement it with other economic opportunities. That is exactly what I'm hoping to do.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business even gave the red tape costs per employee as \$6,744, which gave us a failing grade. I'm not looking to throw shots across the aisle, but what I am trying to say is that we do have barriers here, Mr. Speaker, and they cost real money. They cost real money. It costs businesses, and the reality is that it costs jobs.

When you live in a community of 3,500 people, like I do, or other communities across Cardston-Siksika, where the town sizes range between, well, I guess, very small to 1,800 people, 2,000 people, 3,500 – they're not all bedroom communities for Lethbridge. These are all communities that need support, that have hard-working men and women there who just want to make the most of their opportunities, and they're there.

I encourage this government and I encourage the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction to keep along this path to supporting economic diversification in Alberta. Don't forget about rural Alberta, Mr. Speaker, because rural Alberta plays such an integral part in this province. We contribute so much to the country. We produce, we work hard, and all we ask in return is for a little bit of support, to not be forgotten when the time comes when policies are developed. I implore the government to do that. I've received a lot of feedback. In fact, when the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction just spoke, I was greatly encouraged by the continued direction of his ministry.

If I can close by simply saying, Mr. Speaker, how grateful I am to have this opportunity to move this motion, to speak on behalf of the fine people of Cardston-Siksika, and to have it echo through this Chamber as many times as possible: don't forget about rural Alberta.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 510 carried]

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Deputy Government House Leader has risen to speak.

Mrs. Savage: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn until this evening at 7:30.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:04 p.m.]

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