



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, December 3, 2019

Day 51

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature

First Session

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New Democrat: 24

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, December 3, 2019

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Good afternoon, hon. members. Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, it is a privilege to welcome back some familiar faces to this Chamber, members of the Alberta Association of Former MLAs. Please rise as I call your name: Shiraz Shariff, Karen Leibovici, Ed Gibbons, David Coutts, and Heather Klimchuk. Welcome.

Introduction of Guests

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, we have two school groups visiting us today: from the constituency of Edmonton-McClung welcome students from Callingwood elementary, and from the constituency of St. Albert welcome students from Joseph M. Demko school.

Now, hon. members, as you may know, the Speaker hosted the International Day of Persons with Disabilities ceremony in the rotunda today, and I am so pleased to welcome two recipients of the 2019 Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities award: Ms Donna Desjardins and Mr. Joseph Sask. Please rise. Congratulations. I'd also like to welcome the chair of the council, Mr. Neil Pierce, and Stella Varvis, chair of family support for children with disabilities, Provincial Parent Advisory Committee. Thank you for coming.

Hon. members, we have guests of the Minister of Seniors and Housing: John and Lyle Hallet. Also, visiting the Minister of Health this afternoon are guests from the University of Alberta's master of nursing program. Visiting the Minister of Transportation is his constituency assistant from Calgary-Hays, Tyler Van Vliet, and his partner, Zoe Szeremet, visiting us from Australia. Welcome, and thank you, Tyler, for all you do. Guests, please rise and receive the welcome of this Assembly.

Ministerial Statements

The Deputy Speaker: The Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

Mental Health and Suicide Prevention

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Today I rise to speak in light of the tragic event that occurred yesterday on the steps of the Legislature. Suicide is a reality that far too many Albertans and Canadians are familiar with. Let's be honest with each other. Suicide is not an easy thing to talk about. It's a heartbreaking reality that we must confront all together, and yesterday's event has once again brought the tragedy of suicide into the spotlight.

Every day in Alberta one or more people may die of suicide and more may attempt suicide, not to mention the countless others who experience depression and other forms of mental illness that can lead to suicide. The difficult reality is that each life lost to suicide leaves a ripple effect across the lives of those who live on – the family, the friends, the loved ones – who are left with broken pieces of their lives, unable to make sense of this tremendous loss. It's a loss that too many people know. I want to remind everyone

experiencing those challenges that there are services available 24/7 and that you are not alone. You are loved, you are valuable, you are strong, and you are worth it.

Over the past years there has been tremendous work done to reduce the stigma that relates to suicide and mental health challenges to help those who are suffering to find help and to bring those who are struggling out of the darkness and into the light. We have awareness days, public health campaigns, and many passionate citizens who dedicate their lives to work with others to get people well.

But, with that, sometimes we forget that there are many small things we can all do to make a difference. We can ask someone how they are doing. We can show someone that we care. We can take the time out of our busy lives to ensure that the people we love know that they are loved and that our loved ones know that we will be there for them every step along the way.

We must all work together to talk openly about depression, mental health challenges, and suicide. These challenges are all too often silent until a tragedy makes them painfully visible. Everyone needs to know that help is always available and that asking for help is a sign of strength. There are resources available to everyone in this province 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.

It shows strength to ask for help. It shows strength to take a hand. It shows strength to share your experience. To help somebody else is very well worth it. If you or someone you know needs help, you can call Health Link at 811 or the mental health helpline at 1.877.303.2642, or if you're in a crisis, simply call 911, because you are worth it.

I know that we must continue to talk in an open and honest way about these difficult issues. At the end of the day, we're all Albertans, and we want each other to be happy, healthy, and resilient.

Thank you.

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

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As all Albertans, we want to take care of each other, to be a shoulder to lean on at times when things are tough. Yesterday we lost a friend, a family member, an Albertan to suicide. Even though we may not know his name, we know of the common struggles he faced – the feeling of isolation, unloved, unwanted, struggling with perceived failures – moments that all of us can relate to.

We all have days where we just don't feel like we belong in the world that we live in. As the day-to-day stressors build up, some of us don't know what to do, who to talk to, or even if we should. Many have been raised not to talk about their feelings, to man up, go to work, and just do what needs to be done. We know better. We know that as people we need to be heard, to feel valued, to know that even in moments of being vulnerable, it is okay, and the days will get better.

We must take real steps to address the mental health crisis in the province. By working together, across all party lines, we can continue to build on the resources and supports that people need. We must continue to expand supports for children and youth so that we can address their mental health needs as early as possible and continue to recognize that as our world continues to become more complex, adults also can get the resources that they need. We all know in this House that there is much more to do.

For those that are in need of support today, please reach out. If you feel that you can't speak to a friend or a family member, then call the mental health line at 1.877.303.2642. It's there 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

We have a responsibility to each other in this House and in the province to take the time to listen, to talk to one another, to

recognize that at different moments and at times we all need to be loved. So take that time. Slow down the business of the day and take a minute, a minute to take care of yourself, to breathe, and to enjoy the minutes and the moments that can quickly pass us by.

1:40

Value who you are, the gift that you give to others around you in just being you. Value those around you, the ones that bring meaning to your life. Tell them that you love them, that they are important. Take the risk of being vulnerable, and show your true feelings to those who are around you. Take the time, that small moment of compassion, that moment of telling someone you love them. A quick hug can make all the difference to a person who just needs that moment. All we really have in the world is time: time to love, time to be loved, and time to enjoy the gifts that each day gives us. So tell the people around you that you love them.

For those who are listening, for those who feel alone, you are valued, you are special, you are loved, and you deserve to live.

Thank you.

Members' Statements

International Day of Persons with Disabilities

Ms Renaud: I'm grateful to the United Nations for declaring this day in 1992 the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. The 2019 theme is Promoting the Participation of Persons with Disabilities and Their Leadership. Celebrating publicly is important, but more important is to measure our progress and to set goals so that we can measure that progress and that our progress is from one year to the next, that it's not marked by election cycles or board appointments. It needs to be like a relay race, where we hand off to each other.

We need to have continuous monitoring on really important issues like poverty reduction. We need to support Albertans with disabilities as they look for employment. Graduates don't find work. Chronic unemployment is a problem. Underemployment is a problem. Participation in postsecondary education is dismal. We need to properly fund education so that parents and families are not having to advocate for this every year. We need to have a place where seclusion rooms don't replace adequately funded classrooms. We need health care that is accessible, complex care that is accessible. We need to address domestic violence and prevent abuse and neglect because that is a chronic problem in this community.

We need to do like the federal government has done and introduce legislation also. Bill C-81, the Accessible Canada Act, received royal assent in June 2019, and it requires that the federally regulated private sector, government of Canada Crown corporations, and Parliament do everything they can to address accessibility. But the most important job that we have is to create inclusion, real inclusion, and that requires commitment, dedication, and action every single day. There are 6.2 million Canadians the age of 15 and over that identify as having a disability.

We have a lot of work to do. I hope that we celebrate today, but I hope that next year's celebration marks a summary of the work that we've done together to take the UN's pledge to leave no one behind.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

British Columbia Energy Policies

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The B.C. NDP government is working to block Alberta energy from reaching global

markets. For example, the B.C. government's lawsuits and judicial harassment of the Energy East pipeline and the Trans Mountain pipeline killed the first and threatens the second. Take also, for example, Alberta's liquefied natural gas. On the one hand, B.C.'s NDP are doing everything they can to stop us from developing our LNG. On the other hand, B.C. is building several LNG projects, including the largest private-sector LNG project in Canadian history. This double-dealing clearly reeks of hypocrisy. To the B.C. government I say: how dare you wilfully support and develop your LNG projects but at the same time try to stop us.

Not only that, but B.C. is actively working against climate change. B.C. is Canada's largest coal producer. They demand that we all reduce GHGs but at the same time export millions of tonnes of coal to China. China is the world's worst polluter and the largest coal consumer. Not only do they have 15 coal plants, but they are building eight more on Chinese soil and another 300 across the world. I guess that with all the Chinese coal money they make, it is no wonder that B.C. looks right past their pretend climate change goals. No wonder Vancouver is the largest coal port in North America. No wonder they are denying First Nations along TMX the prosperity they are asking for. No wonder they turn a blind eye to the lack of Chinese regulations, employment standards, their poor environmental stewardship, and, of course, their dismal human rights record.

The B.C. NDP are the new coal barons, and they've sold out their environmental morals in the name of Chinese dollar signs. The action of the B.C. government directly conflicts with their environmental grandstanding. They are acting only in their own financial best interests and not in the interests of Albertans and the rest of Canada.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Civil Society and Government Programs

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Albertans do not like big government. We do like civil society, though, with Albertans' average donations to registered charities the highest in Canada. Government should foster, not seek to supplant, civil society. Here's an example. The Mustard Seed is a registered charity, with services in Red Deer. They have a lunch program, delivering school lunches to children in need. This service, supported by community donations and volunteers, cost little and worked well. Then along came the NDP, who displaced this service with a big-government lunch program. Instead of free volunteers, big-government employees. Instead of lunches based on need, free lunches to entire schools regardless of needs. The Mustard Seed's approach was clearly better, yet the NDP sought to use the rough fist of the state to supplant the gentle hand of civil society.

Madam Speaker, Albertans yearn for change in government culture. What can government learn from civil society? In civil society love is the motivating force, not a paycheck. Motivated in love, civil society seeks to go the extra mile to serve the one. Mediocrity and bare minimums are incompatible where there is an overarching desire to serve others in love. Let all who work in government seek to instead serve in government and, by following the example of civil society, ennoble that service by serving in love in seeking the public interest. This makes us better in our stewardships.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Urban Indigenous Program Funding

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. On Sunday the Premier reported to media that the cuts now being made are not like the cuts made by then Premier Klein because, whereas the Klein cuts were across the board, these cuts were targeted. So the question we now need to ask is: who is being targeted? The answer is clear: the indigenous community and, more specifically, the urban indigenous community. While the Premier talks about the cuts amounting to 2.8 per cent, the truth is that the cuts to the urban indigenous programming are 100 per cent, and they're across Alberta.

In estimates I asked for a list of the programs to be cut, and the minister was unable to answer me, which is quite telling. Fortunately, I was able to receive a list in writing. When it arrived, I was astounded to learn who was being targeted: the native friendship centres, Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society, the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women, the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre, Metis Calgary Family Services, Native Counselling, the Red Deer Urban Aboriginal Voices Society, and the Urban Society for Aboriginal Youth in Calgary.

Let's talk about what the programs do for indigenous people. They assist families leaving reserves and transitioning to urban centres. They support youth leaving high school to begin postsecondary. They guide women leaving prison to integrate into society. They help women involved with child welfare services to re-establish their homes and resume parenting their children. It is clear that this government is unwilling to assist indigenous people who hope to improve their lives. Isn't that a statement? What this government fails to understand are the consequences of destroying relationships that have been built over years. They cannot simply shut down these programs in hopes that others will be available in time. When people are in the process of making transitions, they often have approach-avoidance behaviours, which means that they enter the programs and exit them a number of times. It's critical that the personnel remain the same so that there are welcome, known faces there for people who recommit themselves to change.

Minister, tears are not enough. It is time for you to find some nerve to resist these assaults.

Teacher and Teacher Aide Positions

Mr. Long: Madam Speaker, I rise today concerned. I'm concerned because school boards across Alberta are threatening to cut teachers and teachers' aides. I've spent time in classrooms across my riding and know that those students deserve the resources necessary to achieve a high-quality education. The teachers in my constituency are incredible people. They work hard. They go above and beyond because they care so deeply about their students. I trust that all teachers do. What concerns me is that while there are many school boards across the province, including those in my riding, who are prioritizing children's education, some are choosing to politicize teachers and the education of our students in an attempt to negotiate with our government. Many of my constituents are confused when they see other school boards making these irresponsible decisions. Why would a school board fire teachers when they can make cuts elsewhere?

1:50

My constituents understand that our province is in debt, and they understand that we need to be responsible while paying off this debt so we can get Alberta back on track.

Albertans also understand that this is a transition period and that a new funding model, currently under development, will help to relieve some of these tensions going forward and into the future.

What confuses them, Madam Speaker, is that school boards are threatening to lay off teachers before they're willing to make any other concessions. It is especially confusing when the government has told them that they expect boards to prioritize the classroom. These boards have reserves. They have savings which they can draw on to help fill gaps where those gaps may exist, and it absolutely baffles me that boards would choose to cut teachers before using these. I see no reason for school boards to be cutting staff when they could make cuts elsewhere or draw on their reserves.

Madam Speaker, I rise today to thank all the school boards who are putting in tremendous efforts to provide the best possible education for our children and still protecting teachers' jobs during this transition year as our government begins to clean up the fiscal mess left by the previous government.

I also want to commend all the teachers who show up every day no matter what and who show so much care for the next generation.

Oral Question Period

The Deputy Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Health Care System

Ms Notley: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's good to see the Premier again, and I'm hoping he can help explain a few things to his House leader. Yesterday the House leader tried to deny that this government has ordered mass layoffs of front-line health care workers. That's only one business day after this government sent letters to those workers announcing that thousands of them would be sacked. Perhaps the Premier can do better. Albertans read the UCP platform, and Albertans have read the letters. Why is this Premier breaking his fundamental promise to Albertans?

Mr. Kenney: I'm not, and the government is not, Madam Speaker. The United Conservative Party committed to maintain or increase health care funding. Last year health care funding was \$20,409,000,000. Under this budget it's \$20,610,000,000. Next year it'll be \$20,616,000,000, going up to \$20,672,000,000 in the fiscal year 2022-2023. Those are increases, not cuts.

Ms Notley: Well, he also promised to protect front-line services, and on Friday at least 5,000 people heard that they were going to lose their jobs.

Now, the Health minister is also displaying the utter contempt for the facts that has become a bit of a hallmark of this government. Yesterday he told media, quote: none of these reductions represent any service cuts at all. Now, Madam Speaker, AHS is laying off thousands of front-line workers, and the letter speaks openly about "reducing or ceasing the provision of services." To the Premier: is his government's refusal to acknowledge what they're doing a function of embarrassment, incompetence, or institutionalized gaslighting?

Mr. Kenney: Madam Speaker, the government is not laying off thousands of people, and the Leader of the Opposition is irresponsibly trying to create fear for people's job security. In fact, the government has indicated the maximum number of positions that could be affected by changes over the next four years. We would hope that there would be significantly fewer positions affected and that those that are affected would be affected by not replacing people as they retire or leave the workforce. We've always been clear about seeking to maximize changes through attrition rather than layoffs. Even if that number were to be real,

we'd still represent the highest per capita number of nurses in Canada.

Ms Notley: Well, Madam Speaker, I would suggest the Premier read the letter a little bit more closely because it doesn't say what he just suggested it did. It does say, however, that they will be looking at closing acute-care beds as continuing care beds open and patients are moved over. Albertans have seen the letter, so think closely. Now, that's about 1 in 5 beds, and while we have no argument at all with getting patients into the right care, those acute beds are still needed to reduce surgical wait times. Will the Premier admit that closing beds is part of his plan to create more private care for the very wealthiest while the rest of us wait even longer?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I will remind the hon. leader of the NDP that during her tenure as Premier hospital wait times for most procedures increased even though the government increased their health budget by 15 per cent, and this is the problem. We have by far the most expensive health system in Canada, but we have higher than average infant mortality and lower than average life expectancy and generally above average hospital wait times while on an age-adjusted basis we spend 30 per cent more per capita than the average amongst Canadian provinces. We call upon the unions to work with us in finding more efficient ways of delivering quality health care to ensure that universal care is there for all in the future.

The Deputy Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Ms Notley: Closing health care beds isn't going to fix any of that, Madam Speaker.

Now, one of the longest running debates in the United States is how to fix their health care system. Democrats and Republicans don't agree on much, but they agree that their system is broken. In Alberta we've taken a different path with medicare and with the Canada Health Act. But at the Premier's own UCP convention his party rejected a motion calling for him to comply with the principles of the Canada Health Act. To the Premier. You promised to protect public health care. Now your party is attacking it. Why should Albertans trust you at all?

Mr. Kenney: Madam Speaker, we are of course maintaining universal – you know, the question is so utterly ridiculous because it's the same NDP medi-scare that we've heard every year for decades in this House and in every other Legislature across Canada. When the NDP is desperate, they roll out the old medi-scare card. But with respect to the letter to which she refers, this is a requirement of the collective bargaining process to indicate the total number of positions that could be affected, not that are being affected. She's trying to scare nurses, suggesting that hundreds of people are being laid off when that is simply not true. It's irresponsible.

Ms Notley: I am strangely surprised that the Premier did not refer to the decision of his UCP party as medi-scare at their actual convention. But, you know, I guess it all depends on the audience, Madam Speaker.

Now, our plan for lab services was based on the Health Quality Council saying that it was the best value. Now it's being sold off. We improved ambulance turnaround times in hospitals with a program this Premier cancelled, and now they're threatening to sell that off, too. Over the weekend the Premier's party called for still more privately delivered health care. Why did the Premier hide his real plan for health care from Albertans during the election campaign?

Mr. Kenney: Madam Speaker, under the NDP much of our health care was delivered by private providers, by physician contractors, by private medical clinics, by day surgeries done by nongovernment-operated hospitals, all within the context of our universally accessible and insured system. That's how the health care system operates in Canada. We need to challenge all of our partners to help to do that more efficiently, including NDP-affiliated unions that are asking for one-year pay increases of as much as 8 per cent. Taxpayers can't afford that.

Ms Notley: What taxpayers can afford, actually, is a Premier who would negotiate in good faith and not in the public. Nonetheless, Albertans also voted to protect health care and respect the Canada Health Act. They're getting something very different and very dangerous, and they deserve to see the real plan. Yesterday his caucus voted down our request for an emergency debate, so I challenge the Premier to debate the future of health care with me instead, live. He should tell Albertans about why he thinks American-style health care is the best. He should have the courage of his convictions and be accountable instead of hiding from the debate. To the Premier: will he do that?

Mr. Kenney: Madam Speaker, this is a debate right now, and Albertans had a debate in the spring on the NDP's record on spending more for less on health care, on spending more than any other province and getting less, on spending more and wait times going up. Now she talks about negotiating in public. It's her affiliated unions, that are actually literal constitutional legal affiliates of the NDP, that are asking taxpayers to pay 8 per cent more in salaries per year when the average private-sector family's after-tax income is down by 8 per cent over the past five years. The NDP could not be more out of touch.

The Deputy Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition for her third set of questions.

Investment in Alberta

Ms Notley: Albertans deserve more than 35-second clips, especially when they are filled with as many inaccuracies as we just saw right there.

Nonetheless, yesterday Husky Energy revealed to its investors what this government didn't have the courage to report to this House, that 370 Alberta workers lost their jobs this fall. What's even more, though, is that Husky is cutting overall spending by half a billion dollars, but they'll still find money to upgrade a refinery in Wisconsin, all this while they pocketed a quarter-billion-dollar corporate handout from this Premier. Why won't this Premier admit he's creating jobs in Wisconsin with Alberta's tax dollars while Albertans themselves get fired?

2:00

Mr. Kenney: Madam Speaker, Husky was very clear that it's because of curtailment that they're making these reductions, curtailment imposed by the previous government because they allied themselves with the Trudeau Liberals, who killed the Northern Gateway pipeline, killed Energy East. By the way, let's not forget that the NDP was opposed to Northern Gateway. They were opposed to Keystone XL. They did nothing to ensure the construction of Energy East, unlike this government. With the opening of Enbridge's line 3, the Canadian portion, pipeline optimization, and special production allowances on rail, it would mean several hundred thousand additional barrels of Alberta crude being shipped in the next year.

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

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I was very pleased, actually, to be at the announcement of line 3's beginning of construction, but investors are backing away from Alberta because of the uncertainty that this Premier is actually creating. He's cancelled successful tax credits, he's threatened Albertans' pensions, and he's cynically fanning the flames of separatism for his own political ends. The CEO of Calgary Economic Development reported last Friday that Alberta missed out on a tech firm that employs a thousand people because of these very actions. Why is this Premier driving investment away with his failed economic policies and irresponsible rhetoric?

Mr. Kenney: Madam Speaker, that is so ridiculous. I'm so pleased to have the opportunity to tell the House about the success Alberta had in winning the support of all 13 provinces and territories yesterday, support for the construction of pipelines, for global market access for our energy, for demanding that the federal government rewrite the no more pipelines law, Bill C-69, and for a fair deal on the fiscal stabilization program and equalization payback to Alberta. Unlike the NDP, we've got every province and territory standing with Alberta on key aspects of our fair-deal plan.

Ms Notley: Well, Madam Speaker, last week a survey of Alberta small businesses showed yet another steep drop in business confidence. In fact, it's the fifth month in a row that small-business confidence has dropped in Alberta. Almost a third expect layoffs in the next 90 days. We're down more than 10,000 jobs since this government was elected. When will this Premier stop whining about how it's everyone else's fault, take responsibility for the problems he has created, and do whatever it takes to get Albertans back to work? [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Order. Order.
The hon. Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Well, Madam Speaker, that display is exactly why the NDP was the first government in Alberta history to be fired by Albertans after one term: anger and tax hikes, a reckless fiscal policy. They raised taxes on businesses, on property, on everything through the carbon tax, on incomes. Revenues went down from almost every one of those sources, and tens of billions of dollars of capital fled the province and, together with it, jobs. This government is acting with lightning speed to do everything possible to bring job-creating investment back to Alberta.

Education Funding

Ms Hoffman: To the Premier. Day in and day out the Education minister has repeated tired talking points, saying that she is maintaining education funding, but now we have learned that she has told some boards to use their limited money they have for building maintenance as a last-ditch effort to lay off fewer teachers. Why? Because she's cutting education funding, plain and simple. Nobody is happy with this budget performance. Does the Premier really think it's okay to put an unsafe roof over an oversized classroom?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, incessantly restating a mistruth doesn't make it any truer. Page 88 of the budget, Ministry of Education operating expense: last year, \$8.223 billion; this year, \$8.223 billion; next year, \$8.223 billion; and so on. We have the second most expensive education system in Canada on a per capita basis.

This is not a reduction in spending. Would the NDP please stop trying to mislead Albertans? [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, heckling is not yelling across the aisle.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: The Premier lives in Calgary. Calgary public has \$32 million less than they had last year, Premier. It's plain and simple. It's math. It's black and white. Please stop denying the facts. The minister is now telling school boards to choose between safe plumbing or teachers. On this side of the House we believe that kids deserve safe classrooms, a toilet that flushes, and a teacher who's there to support them. It's clear that the minister doesn't share those values. To the Premier: do you really think it's okay to have toilets overflowing and overcrowded classrooms, and if you don't, why won't you amend your budget to fund education properly, as you say you're doing but clearly aren't?

Mr. Kenney: Madam Speaker, I believe the hon. member knows that what she is saying is, to be generous, inaccurate. She knows that the budget passed by this Legislature ascribes \$8.223 billion to education this year and next year, the largest expenditure on education in the history of Alberta, the second-highest expenditure on education per capita in the entire country. If her friends . . .

Ms Notley: Twenty thousand more kids this year. Twenty thousand more kids alone . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Sorry. I thought we addressed the yelling issue earlier, hon. leader.

Hon. Premier, please continue.

Mr. Kenney: Madam Speaker, for the folks at home who heard somebody shouting, that was the Leader of the Opposition showing no respect for this institution.

If she's really concerned about these issues, perhaps she could speak to her friends in the school boards about ensuring that this stable budget is reflected in their decisions.

Ms Hoffman: Perhaps the Premier should talk to his friend the Education minister about the realities facing schools: \$32 million cut from the Calgary board of education, Madam Speaker. How can the Premier deny facts? I know he's got a nice big rolled-up budget, but the reality on the ground is different: \$32 million cut from Calgary public, 300 teachers laid off. The minister knows it. That's why she's telling them to divert money from buildings that are rotting to prevent more layoffs. Why won't the Premier admit the facts, stand in this place, and take responsibility for his atrocious budget?

Mr. Kenney: Madam Speaker, again, the budget for education is being maintained. We are maintaining our commitment to Albertans in that respect. We spend the largest amount of money in the history of the province on education even in the midst of a fiscal crisis, a fiscal crisis created by the NDP. Of course, based on enrolment numbers and a number of other criteria in the formula, largely established by the previous government, there will be from year to year adjustments in different school boards, but in the case of the Calgary board of education, with a \$1.2 billion budget and a large reserve, the question is: why was their first resort to lay off teachers? It wasn't the right choice.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Health Care System

(continued)

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I proudly ran as a candidate for this party because, as our platform clearly stated with our public health guarantee, a UCP government would “maintain or increase health spending and maintain a universally accessible, publicly funded health care system.” This pledge is important to me and all members on this side of the House, and it shows an importance to priority in challenging fiscal times. To the Minister of Health. Please give an update to me and this House. Is this government following through on its promise?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The answer is yes. As the member indicates and reminds the House, we campaigned on maintaining or increasing health care spending. That’s exactly what we’re doing in Budget 2019. Let me be clear to the members opposite that nothing in the mandatory disclosure that was provided to our unions last week indicates any cutting of services, any cutting of access to health care services. Absolutely, we are delivering on our health care guarantee. We’ve given the unions the mandatory disclosures that were required to be provided to them. These indicate modest, potential reductions, causing people to overreact, like the members opposite are acting right now. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, members of the Official Opposition were given quiet time and respectful time to ask their question. I would ask that you would honour that to members of the government as well when they are asking their questions.

The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

2:10

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Given that at the end of last week AHS announced that they will be reducing staff by nearly 500 full-time positions over three years through attrition and given that this represents approximately 1 per cent of total AHS registered nurses over three years, which is significantly less than the yearly employment turnover, to the Minister of Health: are you cutting nursing positions, or will they be reallocated elsewhere?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Madam Speaker. AHS has informed the unions of potential modest reductions, including a reduction in RN positions of under 1 per cent per year over the next three years, as the member indicated. This is less than normal turnover. I would also note that we currently have about 3 per cent more RNs per capita than the national average, so the total potential reduction would still leave us around the national average. We’re giving our unions the best information available so that we can negotiate with them in good faith. Any reductions would be through attrition as much as possible. Three-quarters, I would note, of all the potential changes in health care staff are due to a change of employer, not through reductions of jobs overall in the province.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Given that yesterday the opposition leader suggested that rural ridings with new continuing care facilities ought to brace themselves for a reduction in front-line services elsewhere and given that the purpose of additional continuing care facilities is to reduce the burden on hospitals in providing long-term care and given that rural areas already feel a deficit in care providers compared to the cities, to the Minister of

Health: can rural areas expect equivalent services in addition to the opening of continuing care facilities?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. Yes, they certainly can. We need to increase the overall capacity of the system. That means adding continuing care across the province, especially in many of our smaller urbans, where the unmet need is mainly for continuing care. We recognize that there are unique challenges to delivering rural health care. The 2019 budget for the Health ministry puts patients first regardless of where they live. We need to do things differently, and, yes, that will mean some changes in how services are delivered. It’s a dynamic system, always changing so that we can always dynamically meet the care of Albertans throughout the province, but it will not mean reductions in access.

Calgary Finances

Member Ceci: Madam Speaker, up to 216 Calgarians will lose their jobs at the city of Calgary next year due to provincial funding cuts. These city workers will join 300 teachers losing their jobs at Calgary public schools, 250 staff losing their jobs at the University of Calgary, 300 warehouse workers losing their jobs at Federated Co-ops, hundreds more at Lowe’s Canada, and now thousands more Calgarians will be losing their jobs in public health care and ancillary support. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: why does your government care so little about working Calgarians?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Let me be clear. In budget 2019-2020 we maintained 100 per cent in MSI funding to all of our municipalities. I think that the question that that Member for Calgary-Buffalo ought to ask himself is: how did we get there? We got here as a consequence of their four years of disastrous policies. That’s how we got here. We are now cleaning up the mess that they created. They caused so much fear in our economy that it led investors to leave our province, taking hundred of billions of dollars in investment away from our province.

Member Ceci: Yet city workers will lose their jobs.

Given that the people earning those paycheques would have spent money in local businesses on food and other necessities and benefited the Calgary economy and given that those paycheques were all cancelled so the Premier could give \$4.7 billion in handouts to corporations that are now spending that money in other provinces and in the United States, my question is: how many jobs has this minister created in Wisconsin by forcing hundreds and hundreds of layoffs in Calgary?

Mr. Madu: Madam Speaker, unlike the previous government, that left more than 200,000 of our fellow citizens out of work, as a consequence of the changes that we are now beginning to implement in order to clean up their mess, in October alone we added 23,000 private-sector jobs, unlike when they were in government. You know, the public service bloated, and that led to the flight of investments away from our province. We are cleaning up their mess, and we will not be lectured by them.

Member Ceci: Given that even with a frozen city budget Calgarians are paying more property taxes to backfill provincial cuts and given that this includes a property tax increase just to keep the existing police officers on the street after the Minister of Justice

raided their fines revenue, why is this government forcing Calgary property owners to subsidize job creation in Newfoundland while their friends, neighbours, and family in Calgary are laid off by the thousands?

Mr. Madu: Madam Speaker, this side of the House is responsible for the provincial government, and the city councils across this province, like that of Calgary, are responsible for their own budget. We provided the police grant to municipalities. That grant was maintained at 100 per cent. Again, the question those members over there ought to ask themselves is: in the four years that they were in office, what did they do? We know the answer: more than \$60 billion in debt. That is their record.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Seniors' Driver Medical Examination Fees

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. This government continues its full-fledged attack on Alberta seniors. They have kicked people off the seniors' drug plan. They have cut into rental and housing assistance for funding, and now they're planning to deinsure drivers' medical exams, the very exams that seniors are required to take so they can continue to drive their vehicles. Just shameful. To the minister of seniors: why are you making life more expensive for seniors on every front while cutting a \$4.7 billion cheque to big corporations?

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

Ms Pon: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Once again I will just remind the opposition member that our Budget 2019 includes an increase of \$9 million for social and seniors' services and makes sure that Alberta's growing seniors population is well supported.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, given that the population of seniors is growing at 23 per cent annually, of course they need to increase the budget. But individuals are getting less – it's easy to understand that – and given that seniors are required to pass this driver's medical exam at 75, again at age 80, and every two years after that and given that fees listed online suggest that these drivers' medical exams cost in the neighbourhood of \$80, to the minister: please inform Alberta seniors of just how you expect them to pay for your constant barrage of added costs being downloaded onto their already very tight budget.

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

Ms Pon: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Our government must get its spending under control. Seniors have made our province what it is today, but they also understand that we have to control our budget. It's not like the opposition members, who spent money like crazy. We are cleaning up their mess. The MacKinnon report indicated that if we continued down this path of spending, we would soon be more than \$100 billion in debt. We are spending \$5 million a day on interest instead of \$5 million a day to buy . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, given that the government is balancing their budget on the backs of seniors and given that cutting insurance for drivers' medical exams is expected to save the government about \$4 million and given that that represents less than one-one-thousandth of a fraction of the \$4.7 billion giveaway to big corporations and given that that handout isn't creating jobs but that cutting insurance for seniors and will have harmful impacts on our

seniors here in Alberta, to the minister: will you stand up for Alberta seniors, do the right thing, and immediately restore insurance for drivers' medical exams?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Just to correct the record, our job-creation tax cut is actually only affecting government revenues this year by \$100 million, nothing close to the number the members opposite are saying.

Albertans elected this government to find efficiencies, to ensure that we deliver programs in the most cost-effective way . . . [interjections]

2:20

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members. [interjections] Hon. Member for St. Albert, please stop yelling.

Hon. Minister of Finance, you have 35 seconds.

Mr. Toews: Madam Speaker, again, Albertans elected this government to manage this province's finances responsibly and clean up the mess the members opposite have left us. We will deliver.

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

Children's Services Programs

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Spruce Grove Parent Link Centre in my riding provides parenting supports in a judgment-free environment to give extra help to any parents that need it as well as opportunities for parents to connect with other parents who have children of similar ages. Some of my constituents have inquired about the status of these opportunities as a result of the upcoming expression of interest for early intervention and prevention grants. Can the Minister of Children's Services assure my constituents that programs similar to these will continue to be delivered?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. The short answer to that question is: absolutely. This is about providing services where they have the greatest impact and building on partnerships that are already happening between agencies and communities across the province. What we won't do is continue to do things the way we've always done them because we've always done them that way. [interjections] Over the next six months this transparent process will allow community partners to propose the best approaches on how we can strengthen the prevention and early intervention system and serve children and families across the province.

Mr. Loewen: Point of order.

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

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Madam Speaker and to the Minister of Children's Services for her answer. Given the demand for these services in my riding and given that our government has committed to continuing to fund programs for the most vulnerable children and families in our communities, as was seen by the increase in funding for Children's Services, and given that constituents in my riding are worried about whether funding for these kinds of programs will

continue, can the minister elaborate on why she made the decision to consolidate these kinds of programs?

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, a point of order has been noted at 2:21. Two points of order have been noted at 2:21.

Ms Schulz: Madam Speaker, children deserve to be safe, supported, and get a good start in life no matter where they live in our province. For too long there has been a patchwork approach to services that is difficult for vulnerable families to navigate. The new system needs to be more consistent across the province. It needs to reflect unique community needs. It needs to address the gap in services that sometimes exists for children past the age of six years old, and it needs to focus on implementing the precedent-setting well-being and resiliency framework introduced this spring. Many community organizations are already doing this, and government needs to catch up.

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

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Given that I've heard from many stakeholders and constituents in my riding regarding this process, in particular from those who use the Spruce Grove Parent Link Centre, can the Minister of Children's Services please share with this House some of the feedback that she has received over the last few weeks on this initiative?

Ms Schulz: Madam Speaker, I know there are colleagues, likely on all sides of this House, who have heard a great deal of feedback on this new plan. I do understand that change can bring uncertainty, but certainly we've also heard positive feedback from partners across Alberta. In Edmonton we heard, quote: it's the first time in my career in Alberta in 15 years that I've seen a revisioning of our sector, and quite frankly it's long overdue. End quote. In Vegreville we heard: "The Province's updates to the Parent Link Program could allow us to improve and build upon existing services. Change isn't always easy. I commend the province."

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Health Care Professional Positions

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. In recent days my office has been flooded with e-mails, phone calls, messages of grave concern from health care workers and physicians and everyday Albertans about how devastating the health care cuts being carried out by this government are and how they will affect them, and I have no doubt that the members opposite have been receiving them, too. Indeed, we saw this government standing today in question period to attempt to spin this away as they fire 5,000 health care workers and counting. As they jeopardize their jobs, it's not going to help patient care. To this minister: what will happen when these beds are closed because RNs aren't there to staff them?

Mr. Shandro: Madam Speaker, spending more than the NDP government ever did on health care is not a cut. We promised Albertans when we campaigned in the last election that we would maintain or increase health care spending. That's exactly what we did in Budget 2019. That's what we're going to continue to do in future years as well. We'll continue to work with Albertans and make sure that we're going to have our spending be patient focused. We're going to work with both the Alberta Medical Association, our physicians, and our unions to make sure that our spending is in the best interests of our patients in this province.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Now, given that this UCP government's style of consultation is, apparently, to act first, ignore questions later, we asked Alberta doctors how this government's proposed changes to compensation to physicians would affect them and their patients, and given that the doctors we spoke to said that they feel scared, disillusioned, angry, and undervalued and given that patients will be forced to higher cost areas of the health care system such as ERs and admissions to hospital, to this Minister of Health: is the chaos you're creating in our health care system worth your \$4.7 billion gift to big corporations?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As I said yesterday, we started meeting with the Alberta Medical Association on November 13. We provided them the next day with our proposal. We're looking forward to getting a proposal back from the AMA, the Alberta Medical Association. We're looking forward to continuing to work with them, seeing what their concerns are, and meeting with them, continuing to negotiate with them in good faith, and making sure that the money we spend on physician compensation is going to be in the best interests of patients.

Mr. Shepherd: Given, Madam Speaker, that it's not only Alberta nurses and doctors who are getting hurt with these cuts, given that a pharmacy team of eight hard-working Albertans here in my constituency has been notified that the General continuing pharmacy will be contracted out due to AHS budget cuts and given that these doctors, nurses, and seniors depended on this team to provide in-house pharmacy services to 502 residents, a cut that barely puts a dent in this budget, and given that this team, some of whom have been there for 25 years, is already doing everything they can to reduce costs and truly care for residents and patients, will this minister immediately reverse this terrible decision?

Mr. Shandro: Madam Speaker, in our budget, our health care budget of \$22 billion, we provide a grant to AHS of \$12 billion. We trust AHS to be able to work within their budget of \$15 billion – that includes our \$12 billion grant to them – to make sure that they're spending in the best interest of patients. There are going to be decisions throughout the system by AHS and our other allied health professionals. There are going to be changes throughout the system. It means we act dynamically to react to the needs of our patients. This isn't a system that is carved in stone; it is a system that acts dynamically to react to the needs of patients.

Health Care System

(continued)

Ms Notley: Well, Madam Speaker, last Friday a number of letters were delivered to health care unions and health care professionals across this province, and in those letters they talked about the elimination of thousands of FTEs. They talked about additional changes that were coming in the future that would significantly reduce the quality of health care. They talked about a new Ernst & Young report that would bring about even more recommendations. But what they did not do is talk about how any of this related to what this Premier ran on in the last election. I asked this Premier if he would stand up and debate these issues in a full forum so that we could fully discuss them, and he hasn't answered my question.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm very happy to be able to talk about the Ernest & Young report that we're expecting to get sometime by the end of the year so that we can release it to the public in January. I think it's going to be very informative for us as a ministry and as a government, as a province, to work with AHS. It's going to be the first time in their 10 years that someone from the outside has been able to review their processes, their policies, their structure to make sure that the spending at AHS is going to be in the best interests of patients throughout the province.

Ms Notley: Well, Madam Speaker, given that the Premier promised that he would not affect front-line services in health care – he is – and that he promised that he would respect the Canada Health Act and that his party just passed a resolution to not do that and given that they turned down our request for an emergency debate on Monday and given that they didn't say a word of those letters when they debated the health care budget just last month, will the Premier stand up for what he apparently believes is correct and debate me on these issues the way Albertans deserve?

2:30

Mr. Shandro: Madam Speaker, all of that is false. AHS has informed the unions through mandatory disclosures. It's part of the process. Throughout any negotiating process there are ups and there are downs. We look forward to continuing to work with our unions and being able to meet with them at the negotiating table so that the agreement we finally come out of with our unions is going to be making sure that the spending that we have in the health care budget is going to be in the best interests of our patients.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Ms Notley: Well, Madam Speaker, given that the Member for Edmonton-City Centre just described what I believe is probably the first of thousands of real-life consequences from this government's decision to cut health care and attack health care and hurt Albertans and given that Albertans have a right to know whether any of this suffering that they will be forced to endure is worth the \$4.7 billion corporate handout that that Premier just gave away and given that they have a right to a Premier who will stand up for what he allegedly believes is the right way to go, why won't the Premier commit to debating me on this issue?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Again we see from the NDP how naive they are. They think that the health care system, a system that's \$22 billion and serves 4 point something million Albertans, should be carved in stone, that it should never change. It's actually a feature of this system that it can change to react to the best interests of our patients, that we can have change with the system and make sure that the \$22 billion that we have is spent in the best interests of our patients.

Federal Fiscal Stabilization Program

Ms Rosin: Madam Speaker, in the past decade alone Albertans have paid \$200 billion in equalization to the federal government. This is unfair and unsustainable, especially at a time when other prejudicial federal policies simultaneously hurt our province's economic interests. One clear issue is the paltry sum that our province has received in return from the federal fiscal stabilization program despite our recent economic hardships. To the Minister of

Finance: why is Alberta receiving so little from this federal fiscal stabilization program?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. Fixing the fiscal stabilization program is absolutely crucial to Albertans getting a fair deal in Confederation. I want to thank the member for her service on the fair-deal panel, which is hosting its first town hall tonight. The purpose of the fiscal stabilization program is to protect provincial revenues, but it has proven to be wholly inadequate. In 2015-16 our province experienced a \$7 billion drop in revenues, yet because stabilization payments were arbitrarily capped at \$60 per person, Alberta only received \$251 million.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Ms Rosin: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Well, given that Alberta contributes so much to Canada, without so much as a thank you from Ottawa for how much we sacrifice for the rest of this country, and given that the fiscal stabilization program has failed us in our time of greatest need, can the same minister please tell us what needs to change to ensure a fair deal for Albertans from this fiscal stabilization program?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. The key issue here is the \$60 per person cap on fiscal stabilization payments. Without this cap, Alberta would have been entitled to actually \$2.2 billion over two years, ending 2016-17. Our government is working with the federal government and other provinces to reverse this indefensible cap. Further, we're demanding a retroactive stabilization payment or equalization rebate of \$1.7 billion.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Ms Rosin: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you again to the minister. Well, given that there was positive news yesterday after the national premiers' meeting, when it was announced that our Premier successfully convinced other Premiers to support Alberta's position on fiscal stabilization, and given that all Premiers across Canada are now committed to calling on Ottawa to reform this program and make sure that western provinces get a fair deal, can the minister explain what the next steps are to make sure that Albertans get some money rebated to us through this fiscal stabilization program?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. Yes, our Premier's leadership was critical in achieving nation-wide support for our position on fiscal stabilization. The federal government cannot continue to force Albertans to contribute so much through programs such as equalization and continue to shortchange this province on fiscal stabilization. I'm working with my provincial counterparts to advocate for the same changes, and I've had productive discussions with the federal Finance minister, Bill Morneau, on this issue. Fiscal stabilization is an issue that requires correction. We're working on it. We're going to get it done.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Nechi Institute

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. For 45 years the Nechi Institute has been teaching mostly indigenous students in areas like addictions, counselling, and therapeutic training. Their courses are internationally recognized. Now this UCP government has deemed their work to not be a priority and sent the institution an eviction notice, instructing them to vacate their lodge by March 30, 2020. Will the Minister of Infrastructure immediately explain why he's evicting this group that is doing so much good in their community?

Mr. Wilson: The province of Alberta continues to be in the midst of an opioid crisis. This government's priority is to expand access to addiction treatment for all Albertans, especially indigenous Albertans, who are dying at a rate four times faster than nonindigenous in the province. As our friends at Poundmaker's Lodge state:

We believe the current government has been extremely responsive and taken . . . necessary steps to implement and support Truth and Reconciliation recommendations toward increasing treatment bed space necessary for our indigenous people's survival.

The Nechi Institute is currently occupying a strategic clinical space, and we are open to working together to find a suitable alternative location.

Mr. Feehan: You clearly haven't spoken to them.

Given that the Nechi Institute feels that remaining at their current location is important as it is "synonymous with healing facilities that work with us in concerted efforts to combat addictions plaguing our people" and given that this government claims to care about addictions and mental health services but then makes horrendous decisions like this alone, will this Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions tell this House whether he played a role in evicting the Nechi Institute and how exactly this fits into his ministry's approach to mental health and addictions?

Mr. Kenney: Madam Speaker, the government of Alberta is investing an additional \$150 million to address the mental health and opioid addiction crises. Part of that is the creation of thousands of additional spaces for treatment, including a considerable increase in the number of treatment beds at Poundmaker's Lodge. They need to use the space to treat patients. We'll find other space for the Nechi Institute, but this is about additional beds to treat additional patients at a treatment centre. We'd like to hear some congratulations from the member opposite for that.

Mr. Feehan: Madam Speaker, the problem here is that they made a decision without . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, that certainly sounds like a bit of a preamble. I will let you restart.

Mr. Feehan: Given, Madam Speaker, that they failed to consult with the agency that they evicted before making this decision, it's completely ridiculous to defend it now, when they could simply have gone. I'd like to have this Minister of Indigenous Relations stand up and say – will you speak to the Nechi Institute to reverse this decision or at least include them in the decision instead of just arbitrarily sending them eviction notices?

Mr. Luan: As you heard our Premier talking about, this government takes it very, very seriously that we're increasing access for mental health and addiction treatment for Alberta indigenous communities. Madam Speaker, you're going to hear us make an announcement tomorrow, an important announcement, that we're significantly increasing the treatment services for

indigenous communities. Along with that, you'll see that we are adjusting what we have, the limited resources, to make the space available to significantly increase the treatment and recovery health services there.

Budget 2019 and Tax Policy

Ms Phillips: Madam Speaker, this UCP government hiked every Albertan's taxes. Families are going to pay hundreds of dollars more by 2020-2021. Hundreds of people in Lethbridge – it will be thousands by the end of this UCP mandate – are losing jobs in health care, postsecondary, K to 12 education, and many other public services. The justification is the debt, but under the UCP the debt is \$93 billion, and the UCP deficit is \$2 billion more. Will the Minister of Finance admit that all of this is to pay for a \$4.7 billion no-jobs corporate handout contained on page 144 of his terrible budget?

Mr. Toews: Madam Speaker, it's very rich to be lectured by the members opposite, who put this province on a track to a fiscal cliff, a spending trajectory of an over 4 per cent increase per year while revenues remain flat. Albertans elected this government to bring fiscal responsibility to the province. That's what Budget 2019 does. Our job-creation tax cut will attract investment, will create jobs. We're confident of that. We've had 21,000 additional private-sector jobs in October. We're confident that we will get this job done.

2:40

Ms Phillips: Well, Madam Speaker, given that this UCP government is on track to \$100 billion in debt and given that Albertans will pay more to get far, far less, where is the economic analysis by this Finance minister of what will happen to small cities like Lethbridge as thousands of people lose their jobs? Will the minister provide any analysis that shows what happens to our real estate market, our small businesses, our entire economy when thousands of people are tossed out of work, or do people in my city not matter because they're not UCP friends and insiders?

Mr. Toews: Madam Speaker, when the members opposite were in government, they raised taxes on corporations. They raised taxes on individuals. They introduced the largest tax hike in the province's history with the carbon tax. With that, it sent investment out of this country and this province by the billions, with the jobs and opportunities, which ultimately led to lower government revenues. We will not follow that trajectory. We will take a different track. We will bring balance back to . . .

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

Ms Phillips: Well, given, Madam Speaker, that the debt is the same and the deficit, like everyone's taxes, is going up as a result of this Finance minister's incompetence, will the Finance minister commit to at least reversing his income tax hike on everyone? Even those who are losing their jobs will pay more taxes in his spring 2020 budget. Or is the quick action from his department reserved for booking expensive trips, private jets, and handing out plum sole-source contracts to the Premier's friends?

Mr. Toews: Madam Speaker, the only members in this House who have raised personal taxes on Albertans are the members opposite. Our budget does not raise taxes on Albertans. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Toews: Madam Speaker, I am proud and will not make apology that we have a Premier that's travelling, that's standing up

for Albertans, that's standing up for our energy industry. This was needed long ago. The members opposite failed to deliver to Albertans. We've a Premier that's delivering every day.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, in less than 30 seconds we will resume Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

Antiracism Strategy

Mr. Deol: Thank you. Madam Speaker, today I would again like to highlight the importance of the Anti-Racism Advisory Council to the government, which has been one of the many great initiatives started by our previous NDP government that the UCP has heartlessly slashed. This council played an important role of advising the minister on how to implement tangible actions to combat racism all across the province. I asked the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women on May 29 for an update on how this government would combat racism in Alberta. I'm very disappointed that after six months the minister had no clear answer or directions for the council.

The current UCP government cancelled the grant run by the Alberta Human Rights Commission, valued at \$1 million per year, that helped fund antiracism and antidiscrimination programs for decades in Alberta. This ministry has reduced the community initiative program and other initiative programs by \$56.8 million over four years, which shows a clear lack of interest in combatting racism.

The minister has not come up with any initiative to fight racism or any steps to consider this particular issue a legitimate problem. Given that there has been an increase in hate crimes and extremist and separatist views, the government needs a concrete plan to combat racism. Madam Speaker, to date this UCP government has only delivered good news to big corporations.

Madam Speaker, on behalf of my constituents I strongly request that the government break the suspense behind their strategy, going forward, with the Anti-Racism Advisory Council and come up with a plan to educate students and people over the issue of racism and its impacts combined with the steps this government plans to take against any hate-related racist incidents occurring in Alberta in the future.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche.

30th Anniversary of l'École Polytechnique Shootings

Ms Goodridge: Thank you, Madam Speaker. This year is the 30th anniversary of the senseless murders at l'école Polytechnique de Montréal. On December 6, 1989, 14 women were killed in cold blood simply for being women, making it the deadliest mass shooting in our country's history.

Before the killer opened fire on a group of women, he told them: you're women; you're going to be engineers; you're all a bunch of feminists; I hate feminists.

The women attending l'école Polytechnique were breaking down gender barriers by studying in nontraditional fields. In doing so, they were advancing the fight for women's rights everywhere. They were proving that women could not only enter but also succeed at any academic pursuit they chose. They all had bright futures ahead

of them, futures that they never had a chance to realize because of this senseless act of gender-based violence.

On December 6 we will not only remember the 14 innocent women who lost their lives 30 years ago in Montreal, but we will remember every woman who has been a victim of gender-based violence. I will personally be honouring these women as I participate in ceremonies at both the University of Alberta's Campus Saint-Jean and NAIT, and I encourage all of my colleagues and fellow Albertans to find one of the many memorial services occurring on December 6 across our province and take a few minutes to remember these women and all of the victims of gender-based violence.

Together we can fight hatred and violence. Together we will honour them and remember them.

Thank you.

Oil and Gas Industries

Mr. Sigurdson: Madam Speaker, I started my working life on a drilling rig in the oil and gas sector. I've seen first-hand how the industry has progressed over the past three decades. The environmental innovations and technology improvements that come from our industry have made us global leaders. We have set the bar on environmental and ethical production across the planet.

I stand here every day in support of Alberta's oil and gas sector and its hard-working people. This includes mothers and fathers who sometimes spend weeks or months on end away from their families in order to put food on the table. Alberta's oil and gas sector is the backbone of our economy.

The need for oil and gas in our everyday lives is everywhere. We need it to heat our homes, to get to work, power the Internet, right down to the clothes on our backs. That is why this government understands how crucial it is for us to build pipelines. It's time that we stand proud and also advocate for what our oil and gas sector can do to improve the environment on a global scale. The demand for this industry is not going away in the near future, and the increase in demand should be met by the most environmentally and ethically produced energy in the world, so it's heartbreaking when we see companies like EnCana relocate their headquarters.

Gwyn Morgan, former CEO of EnCana, said, and I'll quote: I'm deeply saddened that as a result of the disastrous policies of the Trudeau government, what was once one of the largest Canadian-headquartered energy producers now sees both its CEO and the core of its asset base located in the U.S. End quote.

Regardless, after numerous delays this government is now on track to see additional capacity for Enbridge line 3, and we will fulfill another campaign promise with pipe for TMX going in the ground before Christmas. This government will not stop there. We will continue to work tirelessly for more pipelines. We were elected to stand up for Albertans, create jobs, restore our economy, and get pipelines built. We will do just that.

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

2:50

Public Accounts Committee

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today on behalf of Albertans to stand up for their best interests and to remind ourselves that our primary goal as legislators is to represent them to the best of our abilities. As deputy chair of the Public Account Committee I am an outspoken advocate of leaving partisanship at the door in our all-important work. Our objective and focus should be to respectfully hold our ministries, agencies, boards, commissions, and Crown corporations to account in a nonpartisan

manner in bringing government policies to life for everyday Albertans. Fifteen members of this Assembly have the privilege of serving on Public Accounts, and our mandate is to review the reports of the Auditor General of Alberta and the public accounts of this province.

The Canadian Audit and Accountability Foundation's list of best practices strongly reinforces that public accounts committees function most effectively when partisan behaviour is left behind. We have heard from our federal peers how their Public Accounts Committee has found a way to check their partisan hats at the door and, in doing so, have passed 70 unanimous motions in recent years. Madam Speaker, that's 12 members from three politically diverse federal parties passing 70 unanimous motions. If outcomes that are in the best interests of all Albertans are the objective and nonpartisan perspectives help us to achieve this, then I would strongly suggest that this is what we should collectively strive for as we end this session and focus on doing our best work in 2020 and beyond.

I am proud of the unbiased clarity and focus demonstrated by UCP members, eight of them fresh, new, and idealistic MLAs who have kept their promise to hold their government to account during their first year in office. Make no mistake that on this side of the House our commitment to holding the government to account, to working hard for Albertans, and to leaving our partisan hats at the door will be unwavering in the years ahead. We humbly thank you for the honour and opportunity to serve.

Thank you.

Presenting Petitions

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

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise again to table under the appropriate portion of the Routine a petition that I brought forward yesterday on behalf of a constituent from my riding. It's a petition signed by 232 Albertans. The petition urges the government of Alberta to introduce legislation that a pet store operator or a vendor at a reptile, bird, or mammal exhibition shall not sell any live mammal, bird, reptile, or amphibian unless the animal was obtained from an animal rescue organization or a humane society shelter.

Thank you.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, I have a tabling, five copies of the LAO annual report. Thank you.

Any other members wishing to make a tabling? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I have a couple of tablings today. First, several copies of letters that I've received – I'm sure other colleagues have received similar letters – from teachers talking about their deep concerns about class sizes as well as how it relates to what the Learning Commission says are appropriate class sizes and on the complexity in their classrooms as well.

I'll be tabling those as well as letters I've received from a number of Albertans talking specifically about cuts to public education and specifically the attack on public education that is being proposed through the now UCP policy, passed on the weekend, of a voucher system here in the province of Alberta, which, of course, would push an American-style education model. These Albertans are deeply concerned.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Certainly, my constituency office has been deluged with hundreds of letters from Alberta teachers, teachers in my riding, regarding their retirement fund. I'm tabling 27 more today, and I have the requisite copies.

Also, I have a second tabling, which is, again, about education, about public education, and just some significant concerns that constituents of my riding have regarding the cuts to education.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm tabling five copies of four letters. The first is from Ms Pringle, a constituent concerned about her public service pension and Bill 22's removal of that joint governance.

The next one is to Alisha, a public servant, a 20-year city worker who's worried sick that Bill 22 fundamentally affects her retirement future, from Ms Sellars, a teacher concerned about class sizes growing, her pension, and the lack of suitable funding.

Mr. Fouhy, a teacher, disagrees vehemently that his ATRF pension was invested in AIMCo and moved.

Lastly, Mr. Haskoylu, a parent of two children in public school, is concerned about the job cuts affecting the quality of his kids' education.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The former Member for Calgary-Buffalo and current Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I rise to table copies of letters from Albertans as well. These Albertans are concerned about the provincial government taking over their pensions, whether LAPP, CPP, ATRF, or AIMCo. I will not read the first letter since it's not very parliamentary.

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

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to table the requisite number of copies of an e-mail from my constituent on behalf of close family friends who are constituents of the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. They are deeply concerned about this government's decision to withdraw coverage of Remicade and the impact it will have on their young son.

I would also like to table the requisite number of copies of 35 e-mails from constituents who are concerned and expressing their strong objection to the government's decision to seize their pension. Their message to the government is that they should keep their hands off their pensions.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I have again dozens of letters from Grande Prairie, Red Deer, Calgary, and Edmonton from citizens that are very upset about this government taking their pensions without their permission.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have two tablings I'd like to make. The first is a number of e-mails received from folks, again, all across Alberta who are quite concerned about the budget, in particular cuts to the public sector.

The next tabling I would like to make: a number of e-mails, again, from folks from Red Deer-North and from other parts of Red Deer who are quite concerned about education funding.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to table the appropriate number of copies of a document that I would recommend all MLAs read entitled *The Five Corrupt Pillars of Climate Change Denial*.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise on behalf of the Member for St. Albert to submit the appropriate number of copies of an article entitled *Exposing the Canadian Oil Sector's Victim Complex*: "This is part four of a four-part series, in which *Canada's National Observer* presents a data-based dismantling of the false claim that Alberta's oil and gas sector has been targeted by a cabal of American foundations."

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I did not realize that the Clerk had some tablings today. As such, I will use my ability within the standing orders to extend the Routine.

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 hon. Mr. Shandro, Minister of Health, pursuant to the Health Professions Act the College of Hearing Aid Practitioners of Alberta annual report 2018-19.

On behalf of hon. Mr. Toews, President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance, pursuant to the Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis Act the Alberta Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis annual report 2018-19.

On behalf of hon. Mr. Madu, Minister of Municipal Affairs, response to a question raised by MLA Ceci, hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, on November 7, 2019, in the Ministry of Municipal Affairs main estimates debate.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, we are now at points of order. I noted two points of order. The first one was from the Official Opposition at 2:21. That's confirming the confusion that we had earlier.

The only point of order is by the hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley.

3:00

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Yes. I am raising a point of order under Standing Order 23(j), "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." At about 2:21 in an exchange between the Minister of Children's Services and the Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain I and I think many others in this House clearly heard the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford use a vulgar phrase that is clearly unparliamentary. Now, I would prefer not to repeat the words, but I would say that the phrase would represent the subject matter of someone who studies bovine scatology. Now, I'm sure that the hon. member has an education, but I don't believe that that's probably the subject

matter of his education. I would ask at this time that the member retract that and apologize to the House.

Mr. Feehan: Madam Speaker, I admit I said the words and that they were wrong, because I assume that they are not full, but they're probably down a quart. As a result, I withdraw the words and apologize to the House. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, would you like to try that one more time?

Mr. Feehan: Madam Speaker, I withdraw the words and apologize to the House.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. I will consider that matter now dealt with.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 26

Farm Freedom and Safety Act, 2019

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Dreeshen: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I rise to move third reading of Bill 26, Farm Freedom and Safety Act, 2019, but first I would like to commend the benevolence, the compassion for democracy of our Government House Leader, who in an upcoming motion will actually return Bill 26 back to Committee of the Whole. I am happy to have more time to debate Bill 26, which actually will repeal and replace the disastrous and failed NDP Bill 6. Throughout the development of this piece of legislation we had 25 consultations – about half of the government caucus attended those – to hear directly from farmers. From Irvine to Fairview, from Grande Prairie to Drumheller we talked to thousands of farmers. The four main themes of this piece of legislation are employment standards, labour relations, occupational health and safety, and insurance. With that we had very positive responses from the farming community.

I'm happy to hear how the debate unfolds this afternoon. Thank you.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

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

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you. First of all, it's my first opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 26. I'd like to just take a brief moment through you, Mr. Speaker, to the minister of agriculture, my neighbour to the east in central Alberta and my friend, and congratulate him on this important piece of legislation as well as the minister of labour, who have worked very, very hard. I must say, on behalf of the constituents of Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, through you to him, thank you very much for beginning to push us back on a path to be able to defend our farm and ranching communities and the constituents that I have the privilege to represent and to undo the disgrace that was Bill 6 that we saw inside this Chamber inside the 29th Legislature.

The hon. minister is correct. I do intend to move a recommittal momentarily. Actually, you know how I'm going to handle this, if it's okay with you, Mr. Speaker, is that I will send the amendments to the table and then give my remarks at that point when you give

me permission to. As soon as we have a page, and they're coming. I didn't give them much notice.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. Government House Leader, we will just give the pages a couple of seconds to just pass out the amendment. Then, going forward, what I will do is that I will ask that you read it into the record. Going forward also, we will be referring to this as REC1, so if the pages could, please.

Hon. Government House Leader, prior to having you read it in, hon. members, if you don't know yet, this is a recommittal amendment being proposed by the hon. Government House Leader. The purpose of the recommittal amendment to the motion for third reading is to return a bill to Committee of the Whole for the reconsideration of certain specified sections. If this amendment to recommit Bill 26 to Committee of the Whole is carried, the committee may consider only sections 1(3) and 2(2).

Hon. Government House Leader, if you would please read it into the record and then continue with your statements.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the motion for third reading of Bill 26, Farm Freedom and Safety Act, 2019, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 26, Farm Freedom and Safety Act, 2019, be not now read a third time but that it be recommitted to the Committee of the Whole for the purpose of reconsidering sections 1(3) and 2(2).

Mr. Speaker, I am glad that you took a few moments to explain to the House what this amendment means. It is very rare, obviously, inside this Chamber, particularly for the government side of the House, to move a recommittal amendment, the first time, certainly, for me and the first time that I've ever seen it in my time in the Chamber from any Government House Leader.

The reality is that I want to be very, very clear. The side of the House, the government side of the House, completely and fully supports Bill 26, Mr. Speaker. I know I will be voting for Bill 26 at each and every stage. Again, through you, I thank the minister of agriculture for bringing this important piece of legislation to this Chamber. Having said that, I have always said, as has the Premier, that I respect the role of the Official Opposition. I was proud to serve in the Official Opposition inside this Chamber in the 29th Legislature, and they do have an important and constitutional role in our democracy. I've always said that I will go out of my way to make sure that they have ample time to be able to participate in debate and do their important work within our democracy.

I spoke, when we were dealing with time allocation on Bill 22, Mr. Speaker, about the fact that government House leaders and opposition House leaders work together to be able to have the flow of debate in the Legislature move forward so that things can pass and, ultimately, the business of Albertans can be done in this Chamber. Sometimes time allocation or using standing orders to move that forward when you are at points where there basically is going to be no resolution to disagreements is how this Chamber is designed. Other times opposition House leaders will spend their time limiting which members of theirs speak so they can strategically use certain members of this House to be able to deliver a message better. As you do know, often a Government House Leader will ask his members not to speak nearly as much on pieces of legislation to provide the opposition more time to do their work. That's the process. It's how our system works, and I'm proud to participate in that as the Government House Leader.

Last week the opposition reached out to me, Mr. Speaker, to ask and to point out that they had mistakenly or somehow stopped debate on Bill 26 in Committee of the Whole and it had passed in committee, but they felt that they wanted to be able to still move forward some amendments. Hearing that and recognizing that we

had time, I wanted to be able to accommodate that process, to be able to provide the opposition ample opportunity to debate this important piece of legislation and to bring forward their amendments. Of course, the minister of agriculture and his team will evaluate those amendments. Me moving this recommittal does not mean that the government is committed to the amendments. We haven't actually seen them yet. But it does mean that the government is committed to giving the opposition ample time to do their important role inside this Legislature.

I do want to close with making it clear, as I did in the beginning, that the government and our government caucus inside this Chamber fully support Bill 26. It's a long time coming, Mr. Speaker. We campaigned on getting rid of the hated NDP Bill 6. I am very excited that it looks like we are getting close to that work being done, and I encourage all of our members to continue to work hard to be able to get Bill 26 out of the Assembly so it can receive royal assent and the NDP Bill 6 can finally be repealed. We can add that to the big pile of promises made and promises kept by this government.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. Government House Leader.

Are there any hon. members looking to debate REC1?

I'm not surprised to see that there are none, so I'm prepared to ask the question.

[Motion on amendment REC1 carried]

3:10 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 26 Farm Freedom and Safety Act, 2019

The Deputy Chair: The Committee of the Whole has under consideration sections 1(3) and 2(2) of Bill 26, Farm Freedom and Safety Act, 2019. Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered at this time on these sections of the bill? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has risen.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and to my colleagues for this opportunity to continue debate in committee, which I believe is a fundamental and important stage of bill consideration.

I do want to answer the question raised by the Government House Leader around not recalling this ever happening, reverting to committee. To remind members who were here in the 29th sitting of the Legislature, we did indeed do this with a bill in health once. There was a bill where the opposition had significantly advocated, and upon reflection we in the government thought it was important to reconsider one of the amendments that had been proposed by them and to propose one of our own, and we did indeed go back to committee. While it doesn't happen often, it certainly has happened. I would say that when we did it previously with that health bill, it led to better outcomes, better legislation, and a bill that I think both sides of the House were proud to vote through in its final stage. So it's not something that is done lightly, but it is certainly something that I think can improve legislation overall. That certainly is my hope for the debate we're engaging in here this afternoon.

I do know that my colleagues will have some amendments with regard to particular sections in this legislation, and I'll be happy to

speaking to those amendments at that time, but at this point I want to highlight some of my concerns as the bill currently stands. I also want to begin by acknowledging that I am well aware that this was definitely in the UCP platform. This is one thing that was campaigned on, to bring in a bill to repeal the legislation brought in by the previous government, but what we're considering here today doesn't just do that. It goes back to far, far greater rollbacks on protected rights for workers than just those that we brought in when we did bring in the previous Bill 6. So while there is a mandate, I would say, to reverse the progress that was made under that bill, I don't believe there is a mandate to roll back rights for workers even further than that.

I'm going to start by talking about a couple of areas. In earlier stages of debate one of the things that was said, probably by the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry – if not him, I'm happy to be corrected as to who said it – was that a testament to the great working relationship between farmers and workers is the fact that no farm workers chose to organize, unionize, or engage in collective bargaining during the period that this law was in place, which I think is a fine argument if you're going to keep that right in place down the road and people choose not to exercise it. I think taking away that right takes away that argument because, of course, you are no longer giving the right to have a choice in your relationship, and to work collectively, as many Charter cases have proven, is constitutional. Not to be collective is unconstitutional; therefore, the right to collective bargaining is a constitutional right. There have been many cases that have argued that point. So here we are rolling back that right. Disappointing but perhaps not the thing that I find most difficult in this.

One of the areas that I do find incredibly difficult – and on the right to organize, of course, that's a breach, so I don't want to downplay that. I do find that offensive, but one that I find probably even more so is the rules around overtime and overtime pay. And I get it. While I was a town kid, my grandparents had a farm, and we spent a considerable amount of time after my gido passed away with my baba on her farm. She told many stories about how the men that they hired over the years, while my gido was still alive and then those who helped in the transition years when he was sick and then later after the land was rented out, made such a big difference to their quality of life and their ability to have a farm, a mixed farm with dairy and eggs and grain and often hogs as well.

I understand that there are times where they will have to work overtime, naturally during calving season, which is my favourite time to visit up north and spend time with my friends on their farm. I pretend to help out. I mostly just drive the Gator and look for wagging tails. There is something about that excitement and that time of year, you know, knowing that you're only going to get four or five hours of sleep at a time, but that's okay because you're out there to save a calf, a calf that is, obviously, a life, but it's also a thousand bucks, give or take, right? You're out there, and you know that you've got a chance to save a thousand bucks if you catch a calf and a cow that are in distress and make sure that they can make it through the night and get the care that they need.

I deeply enjoy those times on the farm. But I do think that it is worth recognizing that when someone goes above and beyond in terms of the hours that they work, there be some type of additional compensation for that. Maybe it's with time in lieu. I know that there are a lot of folks who help, who are farm workers on farms, and when the quieter time hits, you know, November, December, that's a great time to take off a number of days, go on vacation, and not worry about pay in any way.

I do think that that should be rewarded, that extra dedication during particularly tough times like calving season or harvest as well. Of course, you can't predict the weather and you can't

schedule 9 to 5 and you certainly can't always schedule 40 hours a week, but when somebody busts their hump and puts in, you know, an 80-hour week, I think that they deserve to be recognized and have that additional time paid back to them with some kind of premium.

I think we will probably hear arguments that that naturally happens, and I think probably for the vast majority it does, but the reason why we have laws is to protect the minority. The reason why we have speed limits on our highways is not because we think everyone will drive erratically and put lives in danger. The reason why we have those is to make sure that if somebody does behave in a way that's unsafe for others, there are consequences for that.

That's one of the reasons why I think it's important to have legislation, to protect the minority who are at risk. I would say that by taking away these rights that have been in place for a number of years – this isn't something that was just brought in recently. I think that when we take away rights, we erode our responsibility of pursuing justice for all and improving conditions for all, something that we literally pray for in this House every day and that I think is our mandate.

Additionally, the working-hours section I think has some concerns for me in particular, about what it is we are going to be eroding by changing these requirements.

I also think that putting in a marker of five – and I'd be happy to hear more from the minister as to why he chose five. I guess that you have to pick a number at some point, but five seems a little bit arbitrary to me, so that is a concern for me.

Those are some of what I'd say are my highest areas of concern. You know, this isn't something that a lot of people have been feeling brave to speak up on, but there are a number of people who have spoken up. For example, there were some folks, part of the AgCoalition, that said that repealing the farm safety act would be throwing out a lot of good with the bad. Of course, I don't think we're in this place to do that, you know, to do revenge-seeking politics. I think we're here to do good for all. I think that there were certainly a number of positives in the farm safety act that should have been maintained.

3:20

Also, we have the National Farmers Union. Glenn Norman, who has a farm at Kneehill, says that it's made people more aware of the real issues that there are around safety and that it's important that safety be a top priority for anyone, whether you own a farm or whether you're working on a farm for somebody else. These are things that I think should be foundational, that everyone should make sure that we have basic standards in place for.

I have to say that I think some of the changes that are being proposed go far beyond what was campaigned on in the mandate and are rather regressive. I think our Leader of Her Majesty's Official Opposition has been quite articulate in highlighting some of those, particularly ones around having any kind of minimum wage. I know a lot of people who enter into agricultural work do it for a love, a commitment, and a passion for the land, for being stewards of that land as well as for the livestock that they care for or fowl or other living things on their farm. But they also deserve, in my opinion, to have a fair and at least a minimum wage of some sort. Relying on those who are in vulnerable positions to find some way to fight for their own rights, when the government won't even put a basic minimum wage in law to ensure their protection, I think is really harmful. I think it's counterproductive, and I think it could have serious negative effects for folks who want to choose a career in agriculture.

But when you look at having – you do have OH and S. Let me also say that a lot of people I know who work in agriculture, work

in other sectors as well. They work in oil and gas, or they work in forestry. Many fight fires in the summers in the area that I grew up in. They are ways to supplement the farm income. When they work off-farm on those sites, they very capably adapt to OH and S and other restrictions because they are smart, they're capable, and they certainly are able to and wanting to ensure their own safety so that they can return from their other job, that supplements the farm, back to their farm. I think having basic safety standards is certainly fair and reasonable.

I think that all of us probably know somebody who has been injured in a farm accident. I'll tell you about my own uncle, Uncle John Krupa,* who had the original family homestead out at Thorhild. He was stuck in his baler for three days.

Member Ceci: Holy jeez.

Ms Hoffman: Yeah. And he lost his arm.

I'm not saying that increased OH and S standards may have saved him. They may have. Fortunately, he survived that accident. But, certainly, if he would have had somebody checking on him more frequently, his quality of life and that incident may not have been as traumatizing as it was. He sure was able to find the most in life, and he said that the hook could still help him pull calves. Certainly, it was very effective at scaring the great-nieces and -nephews around the kitchen table. But I don't think that anyone should be in a position where they have increased risk and hardship done to them. That's why I think that having some basic OH and S requirements would not necessarily be a bad thing. I think it could be a very good thing.

I agree that farmers, farm owners and farm workers, probably all want to be safe. They all want to be safe and make sure that they can come home at the end of the night to their families, and I think that government could certainly support them in that effort. I don't think it's unfair or unreasonable in any way for us to have basic standards in that way. Basic compensation standards as well as basic safety standards I think should be a right. I don't think that they should be a privilege afforded to those who happen to land on a good employer. I think that everyone who works hard should deserve a basic minimum wage and should deserve basic safety measures to ensure that they can provide for themselves and the folks that they love as well as be safe.

Those are some of my main concerns. I'm grateful that we're returning to committee and, therefore, have an opportunity to bring forward some amendments. Again I'll say that when that health care bill came forward, passed through committee, and then went back, it was obviously an opportunity for us to reconsider some of the points that the opposition made that seemed fair, that seemed reasonable, and that seemed like an opportunity to put in some increased accountability measures. At that time it was for folks in regulated health professions, and at this time it's for protecting vulnerable farm workers.

The last thing I want to say is a comment on the title of the bill, the Farm Freedom and Safety Act, 2019. I felt a little throwback to the days of the then Member for Strathmore-Brooks. Derek Fildebrandt definitely liked to talk about freedom a lot. Anyway, a little shout-out to him. I don't think his name has been said in this place in a long time, and I didn't expect that I would be the one to say it, but in regard to this bill definitely a throwback to him screaming the word "freedom."

Thank you very much, hon. members.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other hon. members? I believe I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore has risen.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair, for recognizing me this afternoon to add my voice for the first time to debate on Bill 26, a piece of legislation that I have some significant concerns with. Like I've said, with my background being in labour I get hung up on the language. I'm always looking for the bogeyman in it. I'm always looking for how language is set up that could create a negative situation. We've certainly seen some interesting points made around language in this Chamber, you know, very recently things like "may" being the same as "will" and "shall." When I see those kinds of things, I'm always looking for how they will negatively impact people.

Just before we had the opportunity to send this back to committee, of course, I couldn't help but notice the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry and the Government House Leader congratulating themselves quite profusely around taking away hard-working farm and ranch employees' rights, rights that, believe it or not, have existed in every other part of this country for well over a decade at the very minimum. I remember discussions in the 29th Legislature, you know, having been very honoured and fortunate to be able to serve during that time, talking about how bringing these kinds of pieces of legislation would absolutely destroy the farm, yet I couldn't help but wonder why the same pieces of legislation that were already in place in other parts of the country had not done that. They were operating just fine. Employees' rights were protected, and they had the ability, when things went wrong, to have a safety net.

The first thing I wanted to bring up, Mr. Chair, was around when we were talking about how we want to get this done very, very quickly so that we can get these changes in effect, but the problem is we've already seen changes that are already in effect, yet the bill hasn't actually really fully passed yet. There's this quest that I've seen the government on around slamming through legislation at breakneck speeds, and we've very, very clearly seen that there has been no consultations around those types of things. I think that when you're talking about the safety of employees, we really need to make a diligent effort to communicate with those employees that are potentially put at risk.

When we look at taking away some of the occupational health and safety rights, what Bill 26 is proposing here right now, again, having been fortunate enough to serve in the 29th Legislature, I remember debating some of these things when they were first being proposed to come in. Something that absolutely shocked me when I first learned about it was a story of a farm. I'm hoping that I'm remembering the area in which it occurred, somewhere in the Edson, Hinton area, Mr. Chair. Unfortunately, there was an accident on that farm, and that farm employee lost his life.

3:30

His widow had to go through the court system, and that fight spanned six years in duration, Mr. Chair. Six years later she finally did get a judgment awarded in her favour. She would probably have very much rather traded that judgment for her spouse. What happened was: great; she got the judgment, got compensated, but the result was that that farm had to declare bankruptcy. It was destroyed because of that judgment. There was no system in place to protect both sides.

You know, to members opposite: all it takes is one example that puts the onus on us to make sure that that doesn't happen again, yet here we are in Bill 26 reversing that safety net that not only would have protected that farm worker's spouse but would have protected the farm from going out of business. We have to be able to balance those things. This bill is rolling that back.

The next thing I wanted to point out is under subsection (2)(a)(iv). Again, Mr. Chair, the language gets me hung up on

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

things, and this is probably some of the most concerning language I have ever seen. The reason I say that – you know what? I probably heard the Minister of Transportation say the same thing back when he served in opposition in the 29th Legislature. “You guys won a majority government. I get it. You get the opportunity to change things, undo things, go in a different direction. Absolutely. That’s what you get to do.”

You know, when you form a majority government, that’s what happens. You campaigned, as I understand, to repeal the changes we made around farms and ranches. I understand that. But this language right here in (2)(a)(iv), where it says that “a person employed on a farming or ranching operation as determined under subsection (2) whose employment is directly related to the farming or ranching [experience]” – now, I’m not going to continue to read on; everybody is able to do that – what that does, based on the language that we are seeing there, is that it fundamentally changes the definition of an employee.

Yes, you won a majority government. You’re allowed to repeal what we did. I don’t think you got a mandate from people to take the whole discussion around what an employee is back a hundred years. You are fundamentally telling people in an industry that they can’t even be called an employee anymore, and that is very concerning.

Now, Mr. Chair, I understand – and I doubt that on what I’m about to say, there would be any member in the House that would disagree with me. I think we have some of the most fantastic farmers and large farming corporations, arguably, I would say, on the continent. I don’t think anybody would debate me on that. But what I’ve learned in my experience in labour is that when you have so many fantastic employers, there’s always one bad actor that will take legislation like this and will absolutely use it against their employee. I’ve seen it happen. Again, all it takes is one.

Thinking back to that story I said earlier around that widow having to go through all of that hassle to get a judgment, after I’ve finished speaking, maybe the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry will get up and tell me – I’m wondering if he consulted with the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction about creating that kind of a hassle again. Apparently, that ministry is there at a cost of \$10 million to taxpayers to help the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry reduce red tape, to make it easier for everybody. I’m hoping that he’ll let me know that he did consult and that that was the way to go, in which case I would argue that that’s creating red tape, which is not what you’re supposed to be doing.

I also couldn’t help but zone in here on the fact that because we’re changing the language around employee and some of the other language changes that we’re seeing in Bill 26, it repeals the rights for farm workers to unionize. Now, again, as somebody who’s come from the labour movement, I’ve always said very clearly to people: if the employer treats their employees with dignity and respect, if they pay them a decent wage, if they give them some benefits – surprise, surprise – it’s very, very difficult to unionize that kind of a workplace.

You know, here’s where I will use the same example again as I always have. I’ve been a part of trying to unionize Costco, and every time I always heard: “Well, I get paid a good rate. I have benefits. I get sick time. There are occupational health and safety rules in place to keep me safe. My boss just treats me good.” We weren’t able to organize Costco. Surprise, surprise.

But then you get examples where you see, for instance, a particular restaurant – it happens to have been close by; it’s under different management now – bouncing cheques to their employees. They weren’t treating them with dignity and respect. I even remember one of the problems that employees had, specifically the female employees. The owners were asking them to wear very

degrading outfits because that would boost business. That’s one example. All it takes is one, Mr. Chair. That’s usually the case for why you bring in these kinds of changes to protect people. This bill is failing miserably at that, based on the language.

Now, I could certainly say, you know, from what I saw during the 29th Legislature and what I’ve seen during this Legislature, Mr. Chair, that there are probably members of the government and caucus side that aren’t very appreciative of what the labour movement has done, not only for them but also for their constituents. I mean, I seem to remember a comment in the last Legislature around: well, unions are just human traffickers. One of the silliest things I’ve ever heard.

That kind of makes me wonder. With sentiments like that, those potentially are workplaces that need to be unionized so that they are able to work safely on-site, so that they are treated with dignity and respect, so that they do get a fair wage, so that they do get benefits. This language that we are seeing proposed throughout Bill 26 is allowing those single bad actors to run roughshod over Albertans, the people you were elected to protect, the people you were elected to advocate for, the people you were elected to keep safe.

3:40

I guess I’m stunned, Mr. Chair. Like I said: I get it. They won a majority government. They were able to come in and make changes on things that we did to try to make good on those pledges that we had been elected on in the 29th Legislature. But like I mentioned earlier, very clearly, you were not given a mandate to take labour legislation back a hundred years.

Mr. Chair, I will be watching closely as this legislation is more than likely put into place. I don’t know if any of the amendments that will be proposed will be accepted. I hope they will. As the Official Opposition we’re here to help. We’re going to try to make, well, some bad legislation less bad and try to protect Albertans from being taken advantage of or, even worse, when we have temporary foreign workers that are coming in, having them treated even worse because this legislation will be enabling for those bad actors.

As we see the fallout from these changes, I hope that the government and members of the caucus are going to be willing to stand up and take responsibility and say, “Yeah, we made those changes; that was us, so that’s all on us, and we accept responsibility for what goes wrong,” and that they’ll be willing to stand in front of those people and say: “We got it wrong. We didn’t protect you.” Hopefully, it won’t be a case of the worst-case scenario where you’re standing in front of a family member saying, “We should have protected your loved one,” because occupational health and safety rules weren’t in place.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West has risen to speak.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I’m grateful for the opportunity to speak on Bill 26, Farm Freedom and Safety Act, 2019, and grateful that we have an opportunity as well to offer some amendments to this same bill. You know, I find it interesting to look through this bill and how it does repeal some or almost all of Bill 6. I certainly do understand logically the government’s execution of their mandate and platform to in fact bring in replacement legislation. I mean, that’s what they said they would do, and they’re doing it. That’s all fine and good.

But there are some sections in this Bill 26 that I think should have some further scrutiny on them. I think that what we might see a case of here is that Bill 26, in repealing the former Bill 6, has some

overreaching activity going on. By repealing or no longer allowing any right to unionize or to collective bargaining for farm workers and, you know, talking about repealing the WCB coverage and some other areas as well, I think we need to take sort of a logical second look at these things.

We all know that, as with all things, our farming industry is evolving over time. Indeed, it's a very strong part of our economy here in the province of Alberta. It's a historic part of who we are as a province and indeed is a modern part of our economy that is producing lots of value-added products and, of course, producing the essential food that we need and so forth. Part of that evolution and that phenomenon, Mr. Chair, is that we see a movement from the traditional family farm – right? – to larger commercial or industrial operations. I think this is a phenomenon that we see in other parts of the world as well. As you see the consolidation of individual family farms into larger commercial or industrial units, then it's important for the labour laws to keep pace with that change as well. In other words, you have more people working as employees on farms, and you have more, you know, larger operations and people working for wages and on shifts and so forth.

While it's, I think, eminently reasonable to have some concession for the particular ways by which the, you know, farms do operate and the seasonal activities do take place, like harvest and calving season and all of those things – you know that you have to accommodate for that – you also have to accommodate within a framework of some standards for labour.

Again, we do produce regulation and law here in this provincial body, and we do it for a whole range of human activity. When we do make laws generally here, we don't do it with the notion that individuals are inherently going to break laws or to push them but with the contingency that some might be doing that. We have rules around traffic and safety and criminal law and so forth, not to presume that the vast majority of Albertans do in fact break those rules and laws but for the protection of individuals, for the contingency, the possibility that someone might do that at some point in time, right?

Having some standards for labour, let's say, in the agricultural industry, I think, is a reasonable move forward considering the historic evolution towards larger commercial operations here in the province of Alberta and to make sure that we're protecting people every step of the way. We want the agriculture industry to flourish, as it has for the entire history of the province of Alberta. It's been a backbone of both our economy and who we are, I think, as Albertans, and we want to keep it that way, right? Part of the way by which you can do so is to make sure you are building a framework of regulation that protects people who do work in that industry.

I have a couple of issues that I just want to bring forward in regard to Bill 26. The first one that I am a bit concerned about is that Bill 26 removes the right for agricultural workers to form or join a union by excluding them in the terminology of employees from the Labour Relations Code. I just want to point out, you know, that we don't want to make laws that otherwise will be challenged later. That's a problem, right? I know that the Alberta Labour Relations Board ruled that the exclusion of other workers, in this case of nurse practitioners, I believe, from the Labour Relations Code was deemed to be unconstitutional. The nurses tried to bring them into a bargaining unit in a formal manner, and the Alberta Labour Relations Board found that that exclusion was, in fact, unconstitutional, saying that these workers were not managers. That's where the state of play is for those particular workers. Excluding any workforce from being called, quote, unquote, employees, I think, is problematic at the very least. I think that it's worth it to explore that and perhaps make some adjustment to Bill

26 to ensure that we are staying on the right side of constitutionality and the rule of law.

Another issue that I just wanted to bring forward is around, you know, this idea of excluding a group of employees that aren't managers and whether the government is understanding that the exclusion of certain groups of employees like nurse practitioners and/or farm workers is going to stand up in court. It's a worthwhile thing to look at. I mean, that's a very reasonable thing that we can pursue, and I believe that it is part of our responsibility as legislators to make sure that the laws we're making are legal, so to speak, right?

3:50

What else did I want to bring up generally? I think that section 21 talks about the rights of employees and employers under the code. Subsection (1) provides:

An employee has the right

- (a) to be a member of a trade union and to participate in . . . lawful activities, and
- (b) to bargain collectively with the employee's employer . . .

Again, if we are moving outside of those statutory rights, I'm just concerned that we might be ending up with a problem down the road.

I think that we do understand generally the government's direction in regard to bringing forward legislation here, but, again, talking about excluding people from the coverage of the Workers' Compensation Board, I think, has a problem inherently built into it as well. We know that the WCB, while it's had its problems over the years, is a way by which you can help to protect not just workers, but you do in fact protect employers as well because they actually will move in and provide the services that an injured worker might need straight away. I believe that WCB coverage also protects the employer from litigation, right? That is a big deal when it comes to injury and people being sued for those injuries. The WCB is a way by which we can help, you know, both to get timely access to, perhaps, rehabilitation that an individual needs and to protect employers from being involved in litigation as a result of a workplace accident.

I mean, those are the two things that I kind of wanted to bring forward at this time. I think that always, you know, we need to cut through some of the hyperbole and rhetoric that we might use around farm safety and so forth and look for what the best way is (a) to ensure the protection of human beings working in any industry, specifically in the farm industry, and, two, to ensure the continued prosperity and support of the agriculture industry by this provincial body, the Legislature.

Those are my initial comments, and I think we might have a couple of amendments that might help to address those issues that I just brought up. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has risen to speak.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise today and speak to Bill 26. I think I'll begin by actually saying thank you to the government for being able to move this back so that we can consider some amendments to this. I think that that's an important thing. I have, it will be no surprise to anyone to discover, a number of concerns with this bill.

Certainly, I have always been concerned when you're talking about any employee being sort of excluded from the Employment Standards Code. Normally when you talk about people who are excluded from the Employment Standards Code, you're talking

about workers that have a relatively high amount of power relative to their employer.

For instance, when I was practising as a lawyer – lawyers are excluded from the Employment Standards Code. Well, again, lawyers are fairly educated professionals, and there are not that many of them, so that gives them a certain relative sort of strength of negotiating position, shall we say. Now, certainly, I'm sure that there are articling students who would argue that they lack said strength of negotiating position, and I've in fact heard jokes of people who've actually worked out, you know, on the 100-or-so hour week that they work, what their actual hourly wage is. Ultimately, I think those individuals are in a position to advocate for themselves. That's the same reason that we have managers that tend to be excluded from some of these provisions, because, again, they're sort of in charge of the area. They have a relatively sort of high level of power in the situation.

But when we talk about farm workers being excluded, I think my concern is that many of those people are not in the same position. They're not always in possession of sort of extended educational criteria. They're often not even citizens of this country, which puts them in a very, very tenuous position. I won't go on at length about the difficulty that temporary foreign workers experience, but in my previous employment the people that came into my office and the things that they had experienced as temporary foreign workers were shocking. It was incredibly eye-opening to someone who has lived in this society for as long as I had and not really known that this was something that was going on.

I'm not saying this about everyone who employs temporary foreign workers. In fact, I have known some people who employ temporary foreign workers who are very, very good, who are good advocates for their employees, who want to help people come here so they can send money back home or so they can ultimately immigrate to Canada and bring their family over. There are some fantastic employers.

But we don't make the laws to deal with those who behave well on their own; we make the laws to deal with those who do not behave so well on their own. I had heard some incredible stories. So when we're talking about excluding these people, it's a huge concern. When you're talking about excluding them from even recourse to employment standards, what that means is that if they aren't paid, like, if they're not paid at all, they have to sue in court. Well, first of all, that's a lengthy and complicated process. That's the reason employment standards exist in the first place, so that people have a simpler process that doesn't involve hiring a lawyer. Secondly, given how long it takes to get a court date, if you're someone who's not in the country permanently, you may never get resolution. You may be gone before this even comes up. I think that all of those things are a big concern.

I've spoken, I think, at length previously to this bill about my views on why WCB coverage is important and about the fact that one of the things that WCB coverage brings with it that people don't always contemplate or consider is the fact that that coverage is no-fault. Rather than someone having to sue, the coverage is just: if the necessary elements are proven – that the worker was injured, they were injured at work, they need certain compensation or certain medical care – then that's it. That's the end of the issue.

Now, admittedly, the WCB process is imperfect. It has certainly been the case that people have sort of bounced around from appeal boards and had some significant troubles with WCB. I'm not going to suggest for a second that that isn't the case. Compared, however, to the process that they receive when they have to deal with a private insurance company who's making them sue, that process is significantly better, because there are things set up about it. The WCB process is intended to be operated by people who are not

lawyers. They have an appeals body that specifically helps you to advocate before the Appeals Commission. All of those things are in place, and I think that those are incredibly important things, particularly when you're talking about people who may not have English as their first language, who may not have extensive amounts of education, who may not be super familiar with even the sort of basics of Canadian law or Canadian society and are therefore not in the strongest position to advocate for themselves.

You know, I've said this before, but the concern I have with allowing private insurance is, again, that it's not even the farmer on whose farm the accident occurred that gets to make the decision. If an employee is injured and they want to seek compensation, the insurance company literally, under their contract, has the right to step into the shoes of the insured person and take carriage of the claim. That means that even if the farmer may want the insurance to pay out, they don't have to. The insurance company can make the decision to litigate the matter in court. Sometimes this can take years and years and years, and for an injured worker who's potentially not able to work, who has no funds to access, who is probably struggling to have a place to live and food, let alone keep up with this litigation, that's incredibly challenging. I'm not in a position to fix that problem because that would interfere with the substance of the bill.

I am, however, in a position to move an amendment that I think at least somewhat improves this. I will keep one copy so I can read it and wait for it to hit the table.

4:00

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member. If you could please just read it into the record and then continue with your remarks.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. On behalf of Ms Gray I move that Bill 26, Farm Freedom and Safety Act, 2019, be amended in section 1(3) in the proposed part 0.1 in section 1.2 in subsection 1(a) by adding “, subject to subsection (3)” after “authorized by the regulations” and by adding the following after subsection (2):

(3) For the purpose of subsection (1)(a), private insurance coverage must be of a type and amount that is equal to or exceeds the type and amount of coverage available under subsection 1(b).

What this does is that it basically ensures that any private insurance coverage that is purchased meets at least the same standards as WCB coverage would meet. I think the reason that this is again important is that it ensures that even though we're not dealing with no-fault insurance, at least if the individual is successful, if they prove their claim, they're able to get the same thing.

I do want to make something very clear on the record here, that by proposing this, I am by no means suggesting that everyone would not do it of their own volition. I suspect that many, I would venture without knowing, probably most would do this on their own. Most would do this because it's the right thing to do. In fact, we've heard stories from both sides of the House of many farmers and many farms that had coverage that exceeded what was necessary, so for most people this isn't going to create an issue. It just creates, essentially, a floor to ensure that everyone is operating on the same playing field, to ensure that there are rules around what we have to do instead of just taking it on faith. I think that that's important. What this will do is ensure that that coverage is in the same amount.

In the most tragic of circumstances we'd be dealing with the death of a worker, and this would ensure that their families get at least what they would have gotten under WCB, again assuming that the claim is proved. I think that's important. One of the reasons I

think that's important is because not everyone has private life insurance. Life insurance is important. Everyone should get it. That's a very lawyer thing to say, but not everybody does have it. In fact, I think there's an increasing number of people who don't have private life insurance. This would ensure that if someone is killed at work, their family receives some compensation. I think that that's pretty important. I don't understand the compensation under WCB to be particularly rich, but it's something. It's something that allows that family to be able to get by, at least in the interim phase, so that at the same time that they're dealing with intense grief for the loss of their loved one, they're not also dealing with financial strain and financial burden and an inability to pay for somewhere to live.

I think this is an important amendment. I think that many out there, myself probably included, would say that it probably doesn't go far enough, but I do think it's better than nothing. I think it is an improvement over the current state of affairs, and I think that that's good, and I'm hopeful that the government will consider this amendment in the spirit in which it is intended to ensure that going forward, folks just have access to that minimum level of coverage. Again, I'm not proposing that this fixes all of my concerns with the bill, but I think it's something.

I think it's an important something because for an injured worker – and I've obviously dealt with a few – things are very challenging. Again, in my experience with them, they want to work, and they want to contribute to society, and they feel a strong desire to be earning income and taking care of their family and taking care of themselves. I think that's the case for most people. When somebody gets injured, that tends to affect them, obviously, financially, but it also affects them emotionally, and it affects them emotionally because they want to be able to provide. A lot of people have a lot of their self-worth sort of tied up in that. Just at this moment when the individual is struggling, we want to make sure that there are some rules in place in terms of how much compensation they're able to get. I think that ultimately that is incredibly important, and I think it's a positive step that we can take towards protecting these workers.

With that, I will close my comments on the amendment and urge all members to vote in favour of it.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Forestry has risen to speak on amendment A1.

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'd just like to explain why I won't be able to support these two amendments from the opposition. First off, I'd just like to address the previous speaker and the former Justice minister of the province when she was saying that when it comes to negotiation bargaining power, somehow lawyers are in a stronger negotiating position than farmers. I'd have to say that (a) I think that farmers and farm workers are actually stronger than lawyers in a lot of respects. When it comes to farm workers and their critical roles that they have at very sensitive times throughout the year, they have a tremendous amount of value on farms, and that's why farmers appreciate and treat farm workers so well here in the province of Alberta.

I just wanted to clarify that point and also bring to the attention of the House other exemptions of employment standards. A cross-jurisdictional scan that we've done: 4 out of 10 provinces have a family member exemption for employment standards; 9 out of 10 provinces here in Canada have a full exemption from overtime. When you go into specific provinces, our neighbour to the east, Saskatchewan, has employment standards that don't cover employees producing food on farms, ranches, or market gardens.

Manitoba has farm workers that are exempt from employment standards such as general holidays, hours of work, and overtime. I've listed off the many exemptions and examples of exemptions for minimum wage here in the province of Alberta. That goes from students to extras in a film or video production, again, with a large laundry list of other professions here in the province that are exempt from employment standards. I do think it's a very large stretch for the NDP to say that somehow farm workers shouldn't be under that category. They're under that category in other provinces as well as many other professions here in the province of Alberta.

The second part to their amendment on insurance, Mr. Chair. Throughout the consultation period this summer, when we talked to farmers from across the province, there was an apples-and-oranges comparison to private worker insurance. That's something that – we had a unique opportunity here in the province of Alberta to actually have a comparison. Farmers knew what it was like prior to 2015, prior to the previous government forming government. They had private worker insurance, and the market had developed worker insurance products that actually worked for specific farms, for specific types of farms, and also for specific farm workers.

4:10

When the NDP brought in Bill 6 and there were mandatory WCB premiums that were put on all farms, you had a hodgepodge of different farmers saying: "Okay. I guess I'll pay two insurance premiums just because I have to due to the red tape and the extra burden of Bill 6, but I really want to keep my private worker insurance because it benefits me, and it also benefits my workers. It covers them off work. If they go skiing, for example, and they break their leg," which I've actually done, "they would get coverage off the work site." You had other farmers that actually said, "No; well, I will cancel my private worker insurance, and I will go to WCB," which ticked off both the farmers and the farm worker because they preferred their private worker insurance.

Ultimately, this bill, Bill 26, will give a choice in worker insurance so that the farmer and the farm worker can sit down and they can decide: what is the best type of insurance policy, worker insurance policy, that specifically fits a farm? I think that's a Canadian first. I think that choice in insurance is something that is a great thing and one of the very strong aspects of Bill 26.

This NDP amendment: I would not be able to support it, Mr. Chair, but am happy to hear more opinions and debate on it throughout the day. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other hon. members looking to speak to amendment A1?

Ms Ganley: I would move that we adjourn debate on this matter.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Chair: Shall progress on Bill 26, Farm Freedom and Safety Act, 2019, be reported when the committee rises? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: That is carried.

Bill 21

Ensuring Fiscal Sustainability 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 Calgary-Buffalo has risen.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much for the opportunity to address this bill. I think it's perhaps the second time I've been able to do this, and I do want to say that there are many possible consequences to supporting this bill, and that's why I'm not supporting it, Mr. Chair. I will try and illuminate members opposite with regard to some of my concerns to the bill as I talk through some of the aspects of it.

Mr. Chair, Bill 21, Ensuring Fiscal Sustainability Act, 2019, purports to address many things, including tuition costs, student loans, electricity bills, seniors' hardship issues. It talks about, of course, hardship for Albertans who rely on disability income supports. I don't say that it does this effectively or positively for any of these issues that I'm addressing.

One issue that I do want to bring up off the bat as a result of having met with a bunch of young student physicians just yesterday. They identified the concern with this bill around – they believed it would attack their rights as doctors to work where they wanted to in this province once they graduated. They came and explained to me that Bill 21 really ratchets down where they can practise as a result of billing numbers not being given to doctors in certain areas of the province. They felt that that would be a drain on the numbers of graduate doctors who are coming out of med schools.

I asked them, you know: what's the impact on your current class? There are about 140 to 160 students in classes. Calgary has three years of classes of med students, and the University of Alberta has four years of classes, so about 160 students in each of those three- or four-year programs. They said that a significant number of their classmates are starting to be concerned and talk about going elsewhere because of this very bill that's before us. I know they met with the Minister of Health and shared that same concern with the Minister of Health, and I can tell you that they met with the opposition MLAs. We heard them out.

[Mr. Jones in the chair]

I would have to say that I'm very, very concerned that we will be training young doctors but that once they graduate, they'll look to other provinces to practise in the fields that they wish to practise in because of the restrictive policies in Bill 21 on them. It's obviously not a really good thing to happen. The investment that Alberta is making in their training, I would suggest, is tens and tens and tens of thousands of dollars for each of those students. As we know, they want to practise in the areas that they're studying, but if they're not able to do that and get billing numbers in those areas, then they will leave, Mr. Chair, and leaving is the last thing we want to see happen. They said also that this has been constitutionally challenged, and it has been upheld in terms of their ability to practise where they wish, so they just don't see the benefit of Alberta going down the same road and losing students in the meantime.

I do want to focus a little bit on something that I think is a tragedy for the most vulnerable in our province, particularly seniors and AISH recipients and income support recipients and families that set up Henson trusts. Earlier today we heard the Minister of Seniors and Housing address the issue of the lack of being able to in this budget support seniors who are going for testing for their licences. It's covered at this point in time and has been by the NDP government and probably by the PC governments before that. It has been covered in terms of their health insurance costs for that test, doctors testing to make sure that they continue to be adequately fit to operate a motor vehicle in this province. That's being removed by this bill before us, Mr. Chair. So the Ensuring Fiscal Sustainability Act, 2019, is actually making life more difficult for

seniors in our province who are mandatorily tested for licensing after the age of 80.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

More broadly, we see the deindexing of seniors' programs in this province as a result of this bill being brought forward, which again makes life more difficult for Albertans who are seniors. I think my colleague for Edmonton-Riverview said it correctly, you know, that it's all in service of giving a large corporate handout of \$4.7 billion. Seniors are wearing that in part, Mr. Chair, along with many other vulnerable populations.

Additionally, the deindexing of AISH: I want to just spend a few minutes talking about that because, again, I think that that's a tragedy to affect this province. AISH recipients, of which there are about 57,000 in this province, were going to receive their first increment after being indexed from 2015 to 2019 by the previous government, the NDP government, so their benefit had risen, but their first indexed rise in benefit was to be January 1, 2020, and this Bill 21 is eliminating that. As a result of addressing this, the Premier said prior that he didn't believe the elimination of this indexing would be onerous on people who receive AISH, but I would argue differently.

4:20

I met an individual who said that, you know, AISH was obviously his sole income and that it keeps him in his apartment. If there's any change in his status as a result of apartment rents going up, he may in fact be having to move to a cheaper place, less suitable for his needs as he's not well. The deindexing of this AISH payment is something that touches not only 57,000 people but their families. It touches our reputation as a province, Mr. Chair, where we are, again, looking to some of the most vulnerable, financially insecure people in this province to pay for the \$4.7 billion corporate handout that is going to wealthy corporations.

Of course, that's not the only recipient of income supports that is being deindexed. I talked about seniors' benefits. I talked about AISH recipients. I want to focus now on people who receive Alberta Works supports, those who have basic employment supports. There's one other file under Alberta Works that will be similarly deindexed after January 1. You know, these are not substantive monthly supports that people get, but they're going to not receive the consumer price index or the portion of it that was planned for them on January 1.

My colleague talked a lot about the Henson trusts. As we know, we put that in place as a result of advocacy from people who have loved ones who are disabled and want to ensure their long-term enjoyment and quality of life and put monies away. We made sure that those folks would be able to enjoy that trust as an estate planning tool and not see it be eaten away by the policies that were previously in place. We did that, and the removal of that is obviously not something that's going to assist those individuals.

I just want to move on to a few other things that are in this that look like they're going to be problematic for many people in Alberta, and those are cuts to policing and other municipal taxes being hiked. I come from Calgary. I have heard long and hard about the changes to the fine revenues that will make our police service less robust, less boots on the street, as a result of taking a larger portion of the fine revenues that are identified in this Bill 21. Certainly, I heard from many RMA members at the conference I attended with regard to the changes that that will have in their communities and the concern they have going forward if there is not some way of coming up with a solution that involves them in the decision of that solution that they can live with.

I would encourage, of course, members of the government to keep listening to those members, those local politicians from counties and municipal districts because at the local level they have the skills, the abilities, and they understand their situations. Omnibus bills like this, that bring 19 pieces of legislation into place and create one piece of new legislation, are not something as transparent as you would hope. We need to kind of do a better job of explaining what exactly is in these bills for our colleagues who are working at the local level and, of course, want to make sure that their communities are sustainable as they go forward. Without that agreement, without that ability, they really are shooting blind and are having to deal with whatever comes down on them. That's not partnership, Mr. Chair. That's something a lot less than partnership.

The 19 pieces of legislation in one new piece of legislation cover everything from the Health Care Insurance Act to the Housing Act, the Utilities Commission Act. I talked at length about the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped Act. Of course, the regulated cap on electricity rates is coming off as well. I listened to a radio report this morning which talked about where those prices are going in the future, and they were significantly higher than the cap that was put in place by the NDP government.

I want to focus a little bit on the Post-secondary Learning Act. That act, of course, is going to address the issues with regard to tuition. I was recently at a rally where students were present, and they talked about the challenges they believe they'll have as young people trying to complete their postsecondary education, which, we all know, is the key to a better job in life. If their postsecondary education gets expensive, then they may take other avenues or jobs or make other decisions instead of staying involved with postsecondary education. A 7 per cent increase per year for the next three years: compounded that'll be about a 23 per cent increase on that education from today to the future.

I went through a couple of degrees, and both times when I did that, I was able to enjoy not only loans but grants from the institutions and the governments, both in Ontario and here. That was a very different time, you know, when we were able to afford our whole education based on those two incomes, grants and loans, and then supplement that with summer work, summer jobs. Students are less and less able to make that happen for themselves. They rely on a lot more loans, and they have to pay those back. Of course, in this bill those loans are going up, cost plus 1 per cent, which will mean that postsecondary education is even more expensive. Then, on the other side, with less money going to postsecondary institutions from this government in other budget lines, we know that those institutions will be finding other ways to jack up the costs of those programs for their students.

Mr. Chair, all in all, this Bill 21, again, is a problem on many levels. It creates greater hardship for seniors in this province, it creates greater hardship for students at the postsecondary and college levels in this province, and if you're a person on disability income supports, you're going to be receiving less money going forward from this government with regard to deindexing. Just on deindexing, you know, for weeks since the budget has come out, I've listened to various ministers talk about how the benefit remains the same: there's no difference; what are you concerned about? You know, when you parse that answer, the benefit may be the same as the benefit last year, but with the deindexing it's less of a benefit going forward. But that's never kind of acknowledged.

4:30

It's somewhat disingenuous to really listen to members on the other side when they say: "Nothing has changed. Everything is the same. You're reading this wrong." I don't believe Albertans are reading it wrong, Mr. Chair. I believe Albertans can read black and

white. As my colleagues so many times have pointed out in question period, Albertans can read exactly what's in Bill 21 though it is an omnibus bill and very confusing. It ensures fiscal sustainability on the backs of those different groups that I've mentioned. It would be great if members on the other side would just admit that, but they continue not to.

Right from students who are currently in school to young doctors who are finishing their schooling, everything in this bill is a problem for Albertans that will come home to roost in the near future. Albertans will see this bill for what it is. It's an endeavour to ensure fiscal sustainability on the backs of Albertans who are least able to advocate for themselves. We are here as an opposition to do that advocacy. We've been tabling letters, we've been tabling petitions, all to say that there are problems with this, and we need to have that on the record. I've put it on the record at least a couple of times.

I think, you know, the thing that I was most proud of going forward was the work we did.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other hon. members? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows has risen to speak.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise in the House to speak to Bill 21. Looking at Bill 21 and the possible consequences of the changes this bill proposes, it doesn't seem like I will be able to support this bill anyway. In reading the name of the bill, Ensuring Fiscal Sustainability Act, and under this bill the changes for students, you know, and people on AISH, it seems like this bill is going to probably result in more austerity than sustainability for Albertans. Under Bill 21 the government is proposing changes to the tuition fees and tuition fee increases.

I will put the changes into perspective and look at the patterns that we are working in the House to address on the issues of everyday Albertans. The government has already rolled back youth worker wages, which has hit their ability big time to save for their higher education.

Through this bill the government is also proposing to cancel the STEP program. This is the second-biggest, I will say, adverse effect on very young people. They will be out of work. The STEP program was very effectively helping, supporting young people to find jobs that would help them to save, you know, money for the things they would probably need for school or to help them save the money they will need for tuition for higher education at the institutions.

Even in looking at the very first of the changes in this omnibus bill, I will say that this bill has mixed up a number of things to confuse people. This is one of the changes out of the 70 changes this bill proposes, and it is enough for me to oppose the bill. It is going to affect these very young people: removing the tuition fee cap. I still remember – I can't forget – those comments the Minister of Advanced Education made in the House, that this was something that was never a concern of the students in universities or the students, you know, pursuing higher education. This is very ridiculous. It was not that long ago, I think a week ago, that we saw thousands of people from the two educational institutions in Edmonton. They came to the Legislature, to the Legislature steps. They opposed the government's changes, and they were willing to meet with the government and share the pain and suffering they're going through and the bad impact this bill is going to cause.

I was sad to see that none of the government members of the House dared or had the courage to go out and speak to those young people that were braving the very cool weather on that day. That is one of the biggest reasons why I think that not only myself but every single person in the House thinks education is a fundamental right

of people, that this has to be protected. This bill is going to have quite an adverse effect. It's very hard.

I still remember one of the conversations I wanted to bring into the discussion. During my campaign, when I was door-knocking, there was a person that would really not be convinced by whatever I would say, but as soon as, you know, I discussed the cuts in education and all of the things, he remembered. He jumped on it and stole the opportunity from me to speak. He agreed that Alberta hasn't even recovered from the Klein cuts to the education and health systems – and this is very important – and this is how he committed his support to me on that day.

This is concerning to Albertans. This is also concerning to the people in my riding. You know, the feedback on the government's budget, on the changes being proposed by the government like the Bill 21 changes to tuition, the changes to student loans: the responses and feedback from the people in my riding are flooding in. I'm receiving e-mails and written letters, and people are coming to my office to see me and give their feedback personally. I still have hundreds of e-mails. I will probably see if I will be able to table those responses from very concerned constituents in my riding. I will see if I will be able to table those responses. That is my responsibility, and I will try to table them, hopefully tomorrow. That is the biggest concern.

4:40

Other big changes are being proposed. I don't know what measures and what homework and what sources and what kind of consultation the government is doing in proposing these kinds of changes in the bill. I'm surprised to see that the government dared to propose deindexing the benefits to the AISH recipients, the very people that are severely handicapped and totally dependent on someone for their life 24/7. The benefits they receive are not even enough to afford the basic, basic necessities of their lives. If you take this into consideration, that the people depend on it in their daily lives, if you take some form of compensation into consideration, receiving the help they depend on, there's no way that you can say that the benefits they're receiving – there's more to do for them.

I just wanted to discuss one more experience I had with someone in my riding. The person was literally crying, you know. He said that he has to come up with and pay \$1,000-plus out of \$1,685, the approximate benefit he's receiving right now. He said that the rent for his place is more than \$1,000, and on top of that, after taking care of the electricity bill and the other utility bills, all those things, there's nothing left sometimes in the month to buy groceries. People have to choose between keeping a roof over their head or putting food on the table. This is a very serious situation. I think the government should have done some more work on this before proposing, actually, to deindex the AISH benefits to very vulnerable people.

That is the other thing. I would even offer to the government to – you know, probably not. I oppose this bill. They probably need to consult the stakeholders and the AISH recipients and to evaluate the real situation they are going through, that they are suffering in their day-to-day lives and expecting more from the government. That was one of the issues when I was running in the last election. I committed to those people that I will represent their issues on their behalf in the House, and I'm very proud to stand in the House on behalf of those needy people and say that this cannot be supported at all. I, on the contrary, urge, even at this stage, the people of this House to do meaningful work in the House. You need to do more consultation, and you need to get more information. You need to roll back the proposals you are offering in this Bill 21.

There are proposals in the bill related to doctors, where it says that the bill will give more power to the minister in issuing a certificate number, and he will also be able to decide where the new doctors can further practise and where they cannot practise. It might have been proposed with some good faith – I'll just give the benefit of doubt on this – but I come from experience, and you can see the unintended consequences. By the time it's passed, it does not have to be, you know, practised the same way that the government might have done. In the broad end, thinking of that, it is going to probably help solve some of the issues the government has in their mind.

These kinds of changes have been very, very controversial and give such a lot of power to the ministry and the people who are well connected to the ministry or to, I would say, the authorities. These kinds of laws have become more to pick and choose people, more to sometimes penalize those people who you don't get along with, who you don't like, or sometimes penalize your opponents and create wedges. In many cases it became the reason for growing corruption in many places. I will still say that this bill was probably put forward with very good faith, but this can lead us to some very unintended consequences. The government really needs to reconsider this change and needs to do more work and more consultation and give more time if they want to move on and change something like this.

The other thing I just wanted to bring into the intention is that life is already becoming harder and harder, and this is even harder due to the province. We all acknowledge that we are going through a tough time. People are having a hard time finding a job. There are more people out of work these days than when the UCP came into government seven months ago. Inflation is still growing. The changes to the electricity law might also affect the living standards of the people and will also probably make their living standard more costly. With living standard costs growing steadily, if not rapidly, I would say, the government needs to support the more vulnerable communities. They should not actually put more burdens on them. The government has taken a big, open-hearted step based on their ideology that their giveaway to big corporations was going to bring in a number of jobs. The amount of something in hand was considerable; \$4.7 billion is not a small amount of money.

Government open-heartedly decided based on a few of the economists they wanted to rely on and believe, even though the vast majority of people opposed it. A number of facts were discussed and tabled in the House, that these kinds of practices have been, you know, experienced in many parts of the world and just even close to our country, close to our province, south of the border as well. But none of the places really see any, you know, positive outcome out of this.

4:50

On the one hand, the government, you know, showed this big heart based on some philosophical beliefs; not signing the agreement, not signing the contracts but just based on their philosophical beliefs. But on the other hand, the government is going after those very vulnerable people, going after \$20 a month on those people. You know, that makes a huge difference to those people, and I still wonder what the government is going to achieve out of this, by proposing these moves, but the only thing we are sure of – and this is obvious – is that it will make their lives harder and make their lives worse.

Also, the changes to the seniors. These people also, you know, are already living with very limited means, so the changes to the seniors by deindexing seniors' programs is going to make their lives harder. The people, the community that's already living with very, very limited means – I can share an example. I did discuss this . . .

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has risen.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 21, the so-called Ensuring Fiscal Sustainability Act, 2019. It's interesting, the title of this piece of legislation. The government wants us to believe that by implementing this legislation in conjunction with the rest of their budget, they're ensuring the fiscal sustainability of the finances of the province of Alberta, but of course nothing could be further from the truth. We see that the deficit for this year is \$1.5 billion higher than it would have been had we brought down a budget this year, and the government is still on track to rack up \$100 billion worth of debt in the near future. It's quite clear that the government is not actually all that concerned about ensuring fiscal sustainability in any meaningful sense, so I think that the name of this bill is a misnomer.

What I do think is going on here, though, is that the government is ensuring the fiscal sustainability of its friends and donors while making fiscal sustainability for the people that are going to pay for those friends' and donors' gifts have a harder time making ends meet, Mr. Chair. You know, we've asked ourselves the questions, and certainly my constituents have come to me saying: "Why is this government balancing the books or attempting to balance the books on the backs of students and people on AISH and people receiving income supports, learner supports, seniors who need seniors' benefits? Why is the government making those people pay while they're giving a \$4.7 billion handout to their wealthy friends and donors?" My response to them is: that's the point. This is a government that is governing for the wealthy classes and is taking advantage of the lack of power of those that are under attack here in this bill to be able to transfer wealth to the government's wealthy friends and donors.

If you look at the list of people who are negatively affected by this bill, Mr. Chair, it's quite clear that the government is intentionally attacking people that they think either won't fight back or can't fight back. Or, you know, there is another class of people, I think, that the government is taking advantage of. This is a group of people that will support them regardless of what the government does to them or regardless of what other government policies are going on. Certainly, there is a move to make sure with some of the changes that are being made, that are transferring wealth from the average Albertan to the wealthy corporate donors that prop up this government, that the government can dodge accountability.

I want to go through those in order, Mr. Chair. Certainly, we see, first of all, in this bill that one of the groups of people that's being attacked, because they don't have the power to fight back and the consequences for this government are low, is students. We know that all of the polling shows and certainly from my own discussions, people who are of the age for going to university or college are certainly left-leaning and far more likely to support our party in an election than the members opposite. There's nothing that the UCP can probably do that would bring those people on board with them, so there is little electoral consequence that these members think that they'll have to pay for attacking students the way the have in this piece of legislation: raising tuition by 23 per cent over four years, hiking the interest rates on their student loans. It's quite clear, Mr. Chair, that the UCP thinks that by attacking students, they won't have to face any electoral consequences.

I'll maybe take issue with that. I know that we saw quite a few hundred students on the steps of the Legislature here not too long ago pushing for the government to back away from these decisions, and I'm sure, Mr. Chair, that's not the last that we're going to hear from students. I would remind students that even though they are

besieged by a whole overwhelming suite of responsibilities – they're working jobs to make ends meet; they've got incredible demands on their time with respect to homework and classes, extracurricular activities, those kinds of things – students do have the power to fight back.

We've seen student movements affect significant change in other jurisdictions around the world. Certainly, Chile is going through a time of significant change thanks in no small part to the activism and collective action of students in that country. I think that once students wake up to realize how much power they hold collectively here in this province, they will start to exercise that power and will begin to act to make sure that this government backs away from some of these decisions. Certainly, students will have my support in whatever expression of that power they choose to use against this government.

5:00

The next group of people that are under attack in this legislation is seniors. Of course, we see that the seniors' benefit is being cut next year. I think probably, if I had to guess why the government is picking on seniors in this bill, it's because they're taking seniors for granted. They think that no matter what this government does, seniors will more likely vote for Conservatives than for anybody else in the provincial election. Mr. Chair, they're taking advantage of that fact so that they can find these reductions in Alberta seniors' benefits and transfer that money to their billionaire supporters and donors.

I think the government is overplaying its hand. I don't think they are right in taking advantage of the support of seniors like this. The seniors that I've talked to in my constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar – and I have a lot of them, Mr. Chair. Edmonton-Gold Bar has one of the highest populations of seniors of any riding in the province. Certainly, seniors did support members opposite in the last election, but that support is quickly evaporating because of moves like this to slash seniors' benefits next year in addition to kicking thousands of their partners and dependants off of the seniors' drug plan in addition to the other attacks that my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Riverview has outlined repeatedly in this debate as well as in her questions to the Minister of Seniors and Housing.

They're also attacking people who rely on disability income supports. So that's AISH recipients, but it's not just AISH recipients. It's people who receive income support to supplement their income in cases where they can't work or they're having difficulty finding work or they're going back to school to get the education that they need to get a better job. Those are people, Mr. Chair, who have a hard time advocating for themselves, standing up for themselves. It's quite clear to me that this government is targeting them because the government perceives that they don't have the capacity to fight back and stand up for themselves.

I think that again, just like with seniors, the government is overplaying its hand here. I've got a lot of AISH recipients and people on income supports who have never voted before, Mr. Chair. But these kinds of cuts, these kinds of cruel cuts that are made, shifting money that should rightfully go into their pockets into the pockets of people like Murray Edwards and Nancy Southern, are absolutely offensive to them. When the next election rolls around, these people are going to come out and make their voices heard, and they are going to stand up for themselves. I think the government will come to regret the day that they brought this legislation forward because it has really aroused a political interest that hasn't been there for a lot of these people for a long time, if ever.

Certainly, we've also seen the government think that it's a good idea to attack doctors and medical students with restrictions on

practice IDs. Again, Mr. Chair, I think that the government assumes that because med students are busy with their studies and their clinical placements and all of their learning, they don't have the time or the capacity to speak up against this government's unconstitutional move to restrict practice IDs. I think we certainly heard loudly and clearly from the medical students who visited us yesterday that that's not true. These medical students have more than enough ability to understand what's going on and are marshalling the resources that they have to push back against this government as well.

Doctors, of course, are another group that's under attack. This one strikes me as incredible hubris on the part of the members opposite. I can't think of a group of people in Alberta who wield more power than doctors, and why the members opposite insist on attacking doctors and related health care professionals – it's not just in this bill. We see them attacking the work of doctors in the conscience rights bill that was brought forward by the Member for Peace River. That certainly caught doctors' attention. They didn't like that. There were 176 doctors who wrote a letter, as published in the *Edmonton Journal*, speaking out against that.

Doctors see the pattern that's going on here. It's not just the Member for Peace River in an isolated attempt to legislate conscience rights. It's not just this piece of legislation that seeks to terminate the agreement with doctors at a moment's notice. They see the pattern here that this government is establishing of attacking health care, and they are also pushing back. I have to say that, you know, why the government thinks that it has the mandate to attack doctors the way it has is beyond me. But I can guarantee you, Mr. Chair, that that is a fight that this government is absolutely bound to lose.

We have here a number of changes in Bill 21 related to municipal funding. They're going to cut the amount of fines that are available to municipalities, and that's going to result in either service reductions or tax hikes at the municipal level, possibly both in some municipalities. That's a tax hike that the members opposite can dodge accountability on quite easily. We've seen the Member for Edmonton-South West try to dodge accountability for the tax hikes already, this morning even, when we were debating Bill 29, because it's not his job to tell municipalities how to run their budgets. I guess it is his job to cut their funding and make it harder for them to make ends meet. But if there are service reductions or tax hikes that result because of those funding reductions, well, that's the municipality's fault. They can't be held responsible for the choices that mayors and councils all over the province have to make, which is remarkable, Mr. Chair.

We hear time and again from the members opposite that part of being a Conservative means taking personal responsibility for things; yet at every turn this group of Conservatives here in this House refuses to accept responsibility for anything. The economy goes down? It's Trudeau's fault. Can't get a pipeline built? Foreign-funded environmental activists. Municipal tax hikes? Well, that's city council's fault. Teachers being fired? Send in the auditors to audit the school board because the government can't be held responsible. You know, I wish that the members opposite would actually live according to what they profess to believe and start taking personal accountability for the decisions that they're making, rather than trying to dodge accountability and blame others for what's going on.

5:10

Finally, we see some measures to attack the power of organized labour: making some significant changes to the collective bargaining process, repealing the essential services replacement worker ban. Mr. Chair, of course, that's all part of a broader pattern that we've seen over the last however long. How long have we been

here? It's only been seven months; it feels like seven years at times. You know, we've seen restricting bargaining rights in Bill 9 earlier in this session, we've seen the farm labour bill eliminating the ability of farm workers to unionize, and now in this bill we have changes to the collective bargaining process and eliminating the replacement worker ban on essential workers.

The reason that this government is so intent on attacking labour unions is because labour unions have real power to fight back against this government. We saw it with the CN Rail strike. On the first day of the CN Rail strike the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake was demanding that the federal government legislate the people back to work, not because he's genuinely interested in the well-being of the nation but because this threatens his agenda. The other labour unions that exist in this province also threaten this government's agenda, and that's why they're using every legislative trick in the book to take away their power.

But I can tell you, Mr. Chair, that working people in this province are having none of it. I have never seen a level of worker unrest as we are seeing right now. You know, the Member for Calgary-Lougheed appears to be taking it lightly. When 2,000 people show up to protest his annual general meeting in Calgary, he welcomes it.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul has risen to speak.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. You know, a couple of times today and just recently from the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar we've heard mention of foreign-funded environmental activists. During question period we were basically accused of falling for conspiracy theories.

You know, I spent a couple of minutes here in the last hour. It doesn't take you very long to dig up some information. One of these fellows – the man's name is Michael Marx – started a group called CorpEthics, who started the Tar Sands Campaign that we hear so much about. Strangely enough, he's got very, very close ties to a lady named Tzeporah Berman, who was appointed by the previous government to the OSAG panel. Actually, both Tzeporah Berman and Michael Marx were presidents of the same organization at one time.

I'd just like to read you a couple of excerpts from a couple of the things that I'll be tabling tomorrow. The CorpEthics history says, "In 2008, CorpEthics became engaged in the North American Tar Sands Campaign." It goes on further in that same paragraph and says, "The campaign successfully blocked all major proposed pipelines, most notably when President Obama rejected the proposed Keystone XL pipeline." This isn't a conspiracy. This is right off the man's own website, and you're the ones that are promoting this stuff.

You know, at one time I talked about comparing these folks to *Stampede Wrestling* when they talk about their fight for Alberta.

An Hon. Member: Great show. I love that show.

Mr. Hanson: Yeah. It was great. But we all knew the fix was in, right?

Ms Ganley: A point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: I hear a point of order has been called.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Point of Order Relevance

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I think this has been a very long session, and I think, you know, we're all entitled to

express our opinions, but I think we're here today to talk about Bill 21. The hon. member hasn't even so much as sort of attempted to make his comments about Bill 21. I think perhaps if I could ask the chair to intervene and direct him back to the subject at hand. I believe his comments are intended, under 23(h), (i), and (j), to provoke disorder and have no other relevance to this bill.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, I'm prepared to rule. I think that in this case there's been a wide swath with regard to debate on all parties and all members. I would, however, taking into account the statements from the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, just ask that the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul bring it towards the bill at hand. I assume that that's coming.

Debate Continued

Mr. Hanson: Absolutely. Mr. Chair, I'm simply in the manner of debate, in the classic form of debate, responding to comments made by somebody else that spoke for 20 minutes closely related to Bill 21. I don't know, but you know, just responding. He's the one that brought up that we were – basically accusing us of conspiracy theories in response to foreign-funded environmental activists that affect our ability to raise funds in this province. Royalties are a big part of it. Sustainability under Bill 21 would be closely related to royalties. I think protecting our oil and gas industry, which they failed to do for four years, is a matter of debate, and I think definitely falls under the purview of Bill 21.

I would just like to carry on with the same Michael Marx that they get so excited when I talk about apparently, a PhD, but he also talks under the Tar Sands Campaign. It's a 17-page item that I'll be tabling tomorrow for the benefit of the members opposite. They can actually read about the folks that they support. You know, perhaps they should educate themselves. Just some key words that come out like "non-conventional fuels, like tar sands oil from Canada . . . Stopping the flow of tar sands oil now, as well as other non-conventional fossil fuels."

Ms Ganley: Mr. Chair, I'm sorry. If I could just interject one more time.

The Deputy Chair: I just want to be clear on what we are interjecting about here, because he has the call. If you stand, that doesn't necessarily give you the right to be called.

Ms Ganley: Point of order.

The Deputy Chair: Point of order? Absolutely. Let's hear it.

Point of Order Relevance

Ms Ganley: Once again, if the member could even refer us to the section of the bill that he's presently discussing, I would be happy to entertain his comments, Mr. Chair, but I believe the comments are really just intended to inflame matters in the House. I don't think that that's enormously helpful. I would be happy to resume my place if we could even know what section of the bill we're talking about.

The Deputy Chair: I'm happy to rule. I think that it has been made clear, though, that the hon. member is relating his comments to comments that were made previously in this House. I don't think that it would be within my purview to actually make the hon. member refer to a specific section when I think that it's within the realm of debate on all sides, all members, to talk about bills in general as well.

If the hon. member could please continue. However, I would say that if he could please try to relate it as best as possible, obviously, to Bill 21, because I'm sure that's what you were doing here.

Debate Continued

Mr. Hanson: Actually, you know, Mr. Chair, we've sat here and listened to hours and hours of debate. It's drifted off into tangents that, you know, we've sat quietly and allowed it to go through. We've been . . . [interjections] Here we go. I've obviously struck a nerve, and I think that's probably enough for one day being that it's this close to supertime.

I'll just continue to, you know, talk about the Tar Sands Campaign. I can read out a few more things. I do believe that it definitely ties into Bill 21, which is the sustainability of our province. Royalties are a big part of it. The Municipal Affairs minister is nodding his head. Like, we get a lot of our money in this province from royalties, and have. It's been very beneficial to our province for very, very many years, 56 years at least.

5:20

The idea that talking about a campaign to shut down our oil and gas industry, that the other folks support with their Leap Manifesto sign-ons – it becomes very clear when you read this. It becomes very clear when you read the Tar Sands Campaign strategy, where they try to influence governments and infiltrate governments. That's exactly what's happened here in Alberta over the last four years, and I think it's an embarrassment.

I'll be tabling this tomorrow for everyone to read. Anybody that wants a copy, I'd be happy to give it to them. It has obviously struck a nerve with the Leap Manifesto crowd next to me, so I'll just call it a night and take my seat.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any hon. members? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has risen.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm certainly proud to rise in this place. I wish we could be speaking of things that I think are more beneficial, but tonight we're going to talk about what the government is doing in this bill, Bill 21, to limit access to health care. That seems to be a bit of a theme. We've seen it earlier this week, or actually I guess it was late last week, when notification went out to health care workers that there will be 5,100 less of them very early in the new year, and that's with regard to nurses, registered nurses as well as LPNs, health care aides, paramedics, OTs, PTs, you name it. This government is significantly underfunding health care; education, too, but in this regard health care.

The latest attack in this bill is around medical graduates, medical students, through the controlling of prac IDs, the physician practitioner IDs, that have been the long-standing practice in this province of how physicians receive payment for the services that they provide. Whether they specialize in family medicine or oncology or any other field, whether they practise in Edmonton or Edson, they all have a prac ID. Some are on ARPs; some are fee for service. While this government could be focusing on ways to improve public health care and make sure that it is actually going to be long-term sustainable for future generations, instead they seem set on limiting the access to doctors for folks in this province.

Many people say: well, this has been tried in other jurisdictions. They're right. It has been tried in other jurisdictions. When British Columbia tried it, there was significant push-back from the medical association. It didn't start with the doctors pushing back, though, it started with the students pushing their medical association and later

the medical association taking it to court and eventually winning. But what happened in the meantime, I would say, was devastating to health care in British Columbia. What happened in the larger urban centres in particular is that . . .

Mr. Hanson: Point of order.

The Deputy Chair: I will give the floor to the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul on this point of order.

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Hanson: Well, Mr. Chair, I just got called on relevance to what I was talking about. Now the member is talking about things that are happening in British Columbia.

The Deputy Chair: I'm prepared to rule on this matter. I think that the hon. member will remember that though you were called on a point of order, there was not a point of order found at that time. So given the wide berth on some of the discussions that have gone here, I think that given what the ruling was previously as well, I would say there is no point of order or that I don't find one, but I would ask the hon. member to make sure that she ties it to Bill 21.

Please continue.

Debate Continued

Ms Hoffman: Yeah. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Happily. Part 1.1 physician resource planning, section 28.1(1), page 5 of the hard copy, for the hon. member's awareness, since he doesn't seem to be aware of what the bill is actually influencing on communities, including communities in northern Alberta.

Back to the British Columbia lived experience that this government seems dead set on imposing here in Alberta. In the larger urban centres what happened is that when physicians were retiring, they were essentially able to sell their practices to folks who were willing and able to pay for the access to be able to practise in those communities, which meant that already established physicians were able to capitalize on the lack of the free market that members so often on the other side say will solve all the world's problems, but here they are imposing some of the most severe market restraints on physicians in this province that I think we have seen anywhere in Canada. So British Columbia is one example. They want to talk about the free market. Let's look at what happened there when prac IDs were rolled back in this way. That was one example.

Quebec: very similar initiative rulings there through the courts. Yes, this bill will be very, very busy good times for lawyers because, certainly, this is infringing on a number of individual rights and liberties. In Quebec what happened was that the physicians, again, spent time in the courts, and the government there learned that they have to balance the carrot with the stick, right? They can't just force folks into employment situations that infringe on their mobility and their ability to practise in other areas, that there have to be some incentives. In Quebec one that has worked quite well is that there is incentive pay or disincentive pay, depending on which way you want to look at it, for folks who choose to practise in areas where the government might not want to be incenting them to practise quite so much.

Another one, of course, that likes to be referred to is New Brunswick. New Brunswick is probably the most current case. It wasn't the courts that in the end said it was ineffective. Although there was time spent in the courts, for sure, it was the Minister of Health in New Brunswick, Mr. Chair, who said that it certainly

wasn't effective and that it wasn't achieving the outcomes. Rather, what was happening – I've got a nice quote here, so I'll just read it. The New Brunswick Minister of Health said: "The physician billing number system no longer works for the province. It is flawed because it restricts the number of physicians practising, restricts the mobility of physicians and impedes recruitment." I'll be happy to provide that tabling tomorrow and the reference for *Hansard*.

What the government is doing has been tried and tested in other jurisdictions. Either the courts or the system itself has proven that it hasn't been effective. Yesterday there were a number of med students here both from the U of A and U of C. We had the opportunity to meet with them, and they are very deeply concerned about the attack on their profession and their professionalism and their ability to live, work, and play in the province in places of their choosing. When I asked them for a show of hands of who plans on practising in Alberta, almost everyone put their hand up.

I said: "Show of hands. Who would like to be able to choose to live, for example, in Edmonton or Calgary, where they're currently living." The majority put their hand up. Now, not all did, because some would really like to be able to return to their hometowns. For example, if you're somebody who grew up in the area that the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul just referred to and you wanted to return to your geographic region, and you'd had a dream of serving as a doctor in Bonnyville because that's a community that you grew up in and that you'd like to serve in your career, but the government decides that, no, you can't – it isn't even about wanting to practise rural medicine. Maybe it's about wanting to practise rural medicine in your hometown, and the government says: "No, you can't. That is not an option."

That's what we're debating here tonight in this bill. Bill 21 has a whole section dedicated to what is referred to as physician resource planning but really is the curtailment of doctors in communities throughout our province. We've had a history in the past of recruiting from out of province and sometimes even out of country, and especially in the north I know that there is a significant amount of recruitment. So interesting priorities, especially when we tell Alberta students: "No. We're going to control prac IDs. We're going to tell you where you can live and not live."

One other example I want to give you. One of the students yesterday talked about how by the time you're a doctor, you're usually a little bit more mature. You've had a little bit more life experience behind you, and many have partners. Many are married. Many are at a point in their life where their government imposing on them where to live could impact their personal relationships as well. One who lives in Calgary has a husband who works in oil and gas and wants to stay working for the company he's been working with in oil and gas. Worst-case scenario, which seems likely because it's in black and white in this bill: the government passes this, and that physician isn't able to practise in Calgary because she can't afford to buy an established practice and has to choose between her partner and her profession.

5:30

Some people say: well, there are lots of professions where people are told where to live and they are accommodated for that. One of the best examples that's been given to me was by somebody who was a med student, who had also been a paramedic and also been an active service member in the military, who said: when I was assigned somewhere, my husband was interviewed, and we were placed together, and he had guaranteed employment, and we had a system that supported us in integrating into that community.

What these med students went on to say is how concerned they were for their colleagues and for their patients. If people are assigned to communities, they will either go there feeling resentful,

not feeling like it was a choice that they made, or they will choose to leave. They will choose to leave the province altogether. That is not something that they wanted to contemplate. When we're trying to encourage youth in this province to pursue a career in health, in the health sciences – and many will consider medicine – are we actually encouraging them to leave our province?

I hate to draw on the cynical part of me. When I read this bill and I see these failed practices from other jurisdictions being considered, I think, like: does the government actually want us to fail public health care? Does the government want to create a condition where people say, "Well, I'm fed up; I will pay out of pocket"? I seriously fear that that is the actual intention of this bill because when you look at the other case studies from other jurisdictions and you've seen how they failed and you talk to the people of this province who are directly impacted by this – I'm talking mostly about the students and, of course, the countless patients – I have very little other justification to give than: the government actually intentionally wants to create chaos in public health care, wants to intentionally invoke a system that has proven to have failed in other jurisdictions, and wants to create great distress for people in being able to access public health care.

I really wish that wasn't the case. I wish this wasn't about pushing a system that has failed in so many jurisdictions. But that is the section I've chosen to focus my comments on at this stage, at this reading here tonight. Certainly, there are many other flawed areas in this bill, but that is one that I think I have some particular recent experience in. I think it would be beneficial to all of us to really push back on what has proven to be ineffective and potentially illegal and, I think, actually, really infringes on what so many people say is a value that they hold around the free market. This certainly is the opposite of anything to do with the free market. This is about controlling and dictating where individuals, if they want to live in the province of Alberta, can live and work.

I think that there are other ways to incent the right type of outcomes in people choosing communities that need to be served or types of specialties that need to be served more. I think that one of the best ways you can do that is making sure that there are proper and adequate staffing levels for allied health and proper and adequate equipment and opportunities for people to practise to their fullest scope throughout the province. I don't think it's always all about money. I think a lot of it is about being able to live and fulfill the career dreams you had when somebody chooses a profession.

Those are the pieces I focused on at this stage, at this point. Certainly, there are a number of other flawed areas in this bill as well, but this is one that I think members on both sides of the House must be scratching their head about because certainly every case study in Canada has proven that this fails, that this is wrong, and that it is not something that we should be heading down the path of. I imagine that colleagues might want to ask the Health minister and the cabinet why it is that they're pushing for this model so aggressively when it's proven to fail.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs has risen to speak.

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. You know, I have sat down here and listened to many of the contributions by the members opposite. I would like to focus on the comments made by the Member for Edmonton-Glenora as well as the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. You know, one of the last comments from the Member for Edmonton-Glenora was that it seems to her – and I'm paraphrasing – that this government really wants to fail health care

and that she's scared that that may be the case, yet again the same farm mongering that we saw in the last election.

This bill, Bill 21, is titled Ensuring Fiscal Sustainability Act, 2019. There's a reason why we've chosen to put forward an omnibus bill that seeks to address a wide range of areas in order to make sure that we are spending taxpayers' money wisely and in a way that ensures that those programs and services are there for them, something that the members opposite had no clue how to do in their last four years that we had them in this province. Let me remind members of this House and, through you, Mr. Chair, all those listening tonight from their various homes that this province at this point in time is in this fiscal mess that has made it possible for us to come forward with a pragmatic, sensible set of bills to undo all of the damages that members opposite, including the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, who sat as the Minister of Health, and the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, who sat as the Minister of Advanced Education – their cabinet pursued policies that devastated our province and our economy.

Let me give this House a very simple example. We collect, on average, in education property taxes \$2.4 billion. That's all we can collect, but education K to 9 costs us about \$8.4 billion, \$8.6 billion. The members opposite will not sit down and ask themselves: if we destroy the critical sector where we make the extra \$6 billion, how are we going to fund education for K to 9? You know what their answer is? Their answer is, you know, more taxes and a sales tax. That's all they've got to offer on a real problem. On a real problem that is their answer: a sales tax and more taxes. I ask them, the members opposite: to what extent are you going to tax the people of Alberta before you realize that you are in fact making it impossible for our economy to recoup? To what extent are you going to tax businesses before you realize that sooner or later you will no longer find businesses to tax? Where do we find \$6 billion?

If we in this province and in this government chose the line of the members opposite and destroyed our oil and gas sector – you have members of the previous cabinet. You know, I remember the Member for Edmonton-North West, formerly the Member for Edmonton-Calder, with a placard written: no more pipelines. A good number of them right here: the only places where you see them are places where there are protests protesting the same source of the money that they want to spend. If they have their way, if the members opposite should have their way and land-lock Alberta's fossil fuels, the source of the bulk of the money they would want us to spend as if there's no tomorrow, how are we going to pay for those programs and services? How do we pay for them?

The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar sits in this House every single day. All we hear from him is, you know, affirmation of those who seek to destroy our vital economic interests.

5:40

Mr. Schmidt: Point of order.

The Deputy Chair: I believe that a point of order has been called. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

**Point of Order
Imputing Motives**

Mr. Schmidt: Yes. Under 23(h) and (i), of course, the Member for Edmonton-South West is making allegations against me, imputing false or unavowed motives to another member, that, of course, being me. I have never ever stood in this House and affirmed anybody in advocating for the economic destruction of this province. I will not stand to listen to the Member for Edmonton-

South West imply or outright say that I do. I ask that he apologize and withdraw.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I'm prepared to rule on this. In this specific case I don't think that there's a point of order. I don't think that it was the hon. minister's intention to quote something. I think that it was more of an idea of debate between views across the floor in this House.

With that, I would ask the hon. minister to continue.

Debate Continued

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. You are correct. You know, in Bill 21, Ensuring Fiscal Sustainability Act, you will find 16 pieces of legislation that impact on key areas of our government, that pose financial pressures on government resources. We have a responsibility to make sure that the most vulnerable amongst us our taken care of. That is not the subject of debate.

Mr. Schmidt: Then why are you scrapping, what are you moving . . .

Mr. Madu: I can hear the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar heckling, as he always does in this House.

Mr. Schmidt: Point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has risen on a point of order.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Of course, under 23(h), makes allegations against another member. I can't remember a single time that I have heckled anybody in this House, and I demand that the Member for Edmonton-South West apologize and withdraw. Maybe, in fact, I can take him on a tour of Edmonton-Gold Bar, and he can apologize to my constituents personally.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I am prepared to rule on this one. I would actually say that in this case I don't find a point of order. What I would say is that I would take this opportunity to remind all members of this House that in the spirit of spirited debate there will obviously be disagreements with regard to what people are saying or how people interpret what is being said.

I am in no way trying to limit individuals in this House from making points of order. However, I would also like to take this opportunity to ensure that hon. members don't use things like points of order to try to join debate. I think that in Committee of the Whole there will be lots of time for us to debate. As you know, individuals aren't limited to 20 minutes only in this forum. They can speak on many different occasions.

If the hon. minister would please continue.

Debate Continued

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. I was alluding again to the various legislation that – Bill 21 seeks to make sure that the programs and services under those 16 pieces of legislation are there for those for whom they were made and that they are there for the next generation, our children, our seniors, and those who would use various health care facilities in this province. The point again is that Bill 21 and indeed all of the other bills that we've put forward that will help us implement the budget that we announced in October are all geared towards making sure that we rein in the financial

recklessness that we saw in the last four years. We heard in the course of the last campaign that the people of this province told us that the path of the previous NDP government was not sustainable.

Again, a very typical example: we made a commitment to maintain or increase health care spending. Now, that commitment is going to be dependent on our ability to afford it. The members opposite would want us to actually follow through with that commitment. The members on this side are prepared to follow through with that particular commitment, but it will be dependent on our province's ability to pay for it.

You know, in Budget 2019 we followed through with our commitment. In fact, we increased health care spending by over \$200 million, but if you listen to the members opposite, you would think that we slashed health care spending by half. Listening to their rhetoric in this Chamber, all you hear is language that causes fear and anxiety in our citizens. They knew quite well that that is far from the truth, that indeed we are spending more money on health care than the budget that they put forward in 2018. Fact. They can't dispute that.

Mr. Chair, you know, Bill 21, Ensuring Fiscal Sustainability Act, 2019, seeks to reverse some of the policies that we saw from the previous government. In 2015 the entire provincial government debt was \$12 billion. In a short four years they took that particular debt to nearly \$64 billion. In 2015, before they assumed office, they inherited a surplus of \$1.3 billion. You know what happened? In their very first year they ran a deficit of \$6.8 billion; the second year, \$10 billion; the third year, \$10.1 billion; and in the last year, before the people of this province kicked them out, \$6.9 billion.

Now, put that aside. On one side, you see from a surplus of \$1.3 billion to a deficit in the billions of dollars in one, two, three, four years. Then look at the debt that they left us: \$64 billion, on course to nearly a record \$100 billion if the people of this province had not stepped in. Unprecedented in the history of this province. As a consequence – as a consequence – we are spending more than \$2 billion on interest. If we didn't do anything, if nothing happened, that \$2 billion would become \$4 billion. Yet the members opposite sit here every single day and tell us how we should go to a particular point and plug in more money while at the same time seeking to undermine the same source of the money they seek to spend. It doesn't make sense. It doesn't add up. It doesn't add up.

That is why, Mr. Chair, through you to all of our citizens watching from home, Bill 21 is essential – essential – to undo the damages of the previous NDP government so that those programs and services that they care about can be there for them.

You know, they talk about \$4.5 billion; then it became \$4.7 billion. This is the alternative universe that the NDP lives in. From \$4.5 billion it became \$4.7 billion. The truth, Mr. Chair, is that more than \$60 billion in investment left our province, disappeared. Investors were telling us that as long as we had this previous NDP government, they would not invest. There was so much of a lack of investor confidence everywhere in our province that even investors in foreign countries were telling us that the combination of the federal Liberals and the NDP at the provincial level made it impossible for them to even consider investing in our province.

5:50

To them through you, if we do not attract investment in our various communities, into our economy, how do we grow our economy? How do we innovate? How do we create jobs and opportunities? They like to tell us that they are the party that is pro employees. Let me remind them that without businesses, without job creators, you know, you would not have jobs and employment for those who need to get them. Mr. Chair, I spent part of my life litigating on labour and employment law and actually on behalf of

employees, and I had the opportunity, as someone who has spent hundreds of hours with the same people they claim to protect, to try to figure out what is important to them. There's nothing more important to them than to make sure that they have that job to be able to take care of themselves and their families, pay their bills, save for retirement, and take their families on vacations. Those are some of the things that are important to them.

What did we get in four years? Record job losses, unprecedented: 200,000. Two hundred thousand job losses and they tell us that their policies were working. Meanwhile our economy was bleeding jobs. They tell us that their policies were working; in the meantime our province and our economy was bleeding investment to friendly jurisdictions in North America.

Mr. Chair, recently we heard that south of the border, Texas in particular, has had more than \$200 billion in investment from the chemical sector. We have oil and gas in abundance, all of the natural resources that that particular sector would require. We have that in abundance here, and throughout the four years that the NDP were in office, they refused to come here. There's a reason for that. When political leaders speak, it's not just citizens who listen. The business community pays attention. That is why, you know, when I sit here and hear them use language like pickpockets to describe employers, to describe the people who create the jobs that our employees need, when I hear the members opposite say that we are giving away \$4.7 billion to wealthy corporations, it tells me right away that they have not a shred of understanding on how you build an economy.

The truth is that when you have a depressed economy, when companies are telling you that they cannot expand, when they have been taxed to death – again, remember, Mr. Chair, that the previous government told us that if we increased the corporate tax by 20 per cent, we would get more revenue and we'd be able to fund more programs and services and wouldn't have to borrow. What happened? The 20 per cent led to a \$6 billion hole in the provincial treasury. As a consequence, they embarked on this reckless borrowing. How do we, then, incentivize our business community to make sure that those businesses are here, expanding and investing? I would submit that Bill 21 and indeed, you know, the \$4.5 billion that they allege and they like to say is a tax cut to wealthy corporations are part of our plan to restore investor confidence and make sure that we are creating the jobs of tomorrow.

It will take time. It took four years for them to send away more than 200,000 jobs from our economy. It took four years for them to rack up \$60 billion in debt. It took four years for them to give us four straight deficits, billions of dollars in deficits. We will not undo all of their damage in eight months. I am thankful that this side of the House recognizes that, and we are embarking on that hard work to undo all of those damages for the sake of this economy, for the sake of the same employees you seek to protect and advocate for so that we can once again rebuild our economy and be able to afford the programs and services that our people rely on.

With that, Mr. Chair, obviously, I will be supporting Bill 21. I urge all of the members of this House to support this bill so that we can begin to undo the damages that the previous NDP government caused to our economy.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

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

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm proud to rise after that particular speech. We have the Member for Edmonton-South West going on at great length about the deficit, which, incidentally, is \$2 billion higher this year under the UCP than it was under the NDP last year. I think it's also worth noting that the Member for Edmonton-South West went on at length about the raising of taxes, which I consider very interesting in light of the fact that he is basically chief minister in charge of the raising of taxes. This bill alone, in fact, significantly cuts funding to municipalities, specifically police funding to municipalities, forcing them to raise taxes or cut police. I think that municipalities are quite rational individuals, and they know that this is not a good time to be cutting back on police, so that foists the costs onto the residents of those municipalities.

In addition, Mr. Chair, this minister has significantly cut MSI flowing to municipalities, again raising taxes on those municipal residents. The proposal in this bill, which was circulated to municipalities, rural municipalities specifically to make them pay up to 70 per cent of their police costs, could cost each individual resident up to \$400 a year on their property taxes. So I think it's a bit rich for the Member for Edmonton-South West to rise in this place and talk about how his values are not to raise taxes when, in fact, he has raised taxes on every Albertan in this province. The fact that he has used a shell game to force it onto municipalities doesn't change that fact. This is a bill that raises taxes. And that's fine. It's within the government's purview to do that, but at the end of the day it's, I think, an unfair allegation to suggest that he's against raising taxes when, in fact, he has done so on various fronts at various times.

Now, certainly, there are a number of other issues in this bill, which I will be happy to address. I think that what I had hoped to address in this particular instance was changes to education, to advanced education specifically, but I see that we have reached 6 o'clock, so I will save my comments for our return.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Noting the time being 6 o'clock, the committee stands recessed until 7:30 p.m., at which time we will continue with Bill 21 in Committee of the Whole.

[The committee adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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