



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, March 24, 2021

Day 90

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 24, 2021

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Members' Statements

Advocacy for Alberta's Oil and Gas Industries

Mr. Loewen: Mr. Speaker, misinformation about our energy industry has long been a problem. Part of this problem is certainly those that purposefully seek to spread falsehoods about Canadian energy in order to achieve their ideological, political, and economic goals; however, equally problematic is the lack of information and education that many members of the public in Canada and around the world have access to. People need the correct information to make informed decisions on our energy industry, and we need to get that information to them.

We've seen many instances in the past where celebrities try to use their profile to promote their political agendas, where just a little bit of correct information would have been helpful to them, including the classic where Leonardo DiCaprio, while filming here in Alberta, suggested that a chinook was climate change. As I'm sure many members of this House are aware, last week Hollywood celebrity and political activist Jane Fonda went to the construction site of the line 3 pipeline in Minnesota to protest the construction of the project. From what she said about our industry, she clearly does not have the full information on the benefits it provides to Canadians, Americans, and the entire world. She claimed that she was engaging in this protest on behalf of indigenous people.

Well, Mr. Speaker, Stephen Buffalo, president and CEO of the Indian Resource Council of Canada, has his own message to Ms Fonda: her protest is not on behalf of the indigenous people in Alberta. Mr. Buffalo invited Ms Fonda to join him and other indigenous energy leaders for a Zoom meeting so she could get the facts on Alberta energy and the benefits it brings to indigenous Albertans. His words were, quote: "Let's be honest. The world needs energy, and the energy sector is very important to First Nations in our province. We've been involved since the beginning. It provides jobs and business opportunities and really helps our communities prosper, and as people closest to the land we have an input into the environmental stewardship, which we're very proud of." End quote.

Mr. Speaker, these words are powerful, and they tell the truth about our energy sector. All Albertans, indigenous and otherwise, are well served by Mr. Buffalo taking the opportunity to educate those who are ignorant to this reality. It is a privilege to be able to read them into the official record of this House.

Budget 2021

Ms Phillips: With Budget 2021 the UCP could have rolled up their sleeves and really done what Albertans are asking them to do, which

is to focus on jobs, economic security, but instead the UCP left Albertans with the distinct impression that the only jobs they care about are their own. The UCP's own budget shows that the total number of Albertans with a job won't rise well above 2018 levels until – get this – sometime around the next election. That's the UCP version of optimism: four long years of no job growth.

The UCP promised action on the economy, but instead the Premier did everything in his power to chase out investment and diversification, including wasting millions on being an embarrassment to the oil and gas industry. Meanwhile most Albertans are wondering: why are these UCP MLAs more worried about their own vacations, their own political tantrums than how they pay their bills? That's why two-thirds of Albertans don't like this budget and why the Premier is the least popular in Canada.

If this budget is based on anything at all, it's taking federal money and sitting on it until the last possible minute, tens of millions of dollars for jobs programs sitting in a bureaucratic bank account rather than helping people and employers. This week we found out that \$137 million that was supposed to go to small businesses and those who work for them: balled up in red tape. The UCP hasn't moved jobs money to those who need it. And for parents who need help with school shutdown child care so that they can actually balance a job with the ongoing challenge of the pandemic: nothing. The UCP approach to helping folks with kids over the past year: radio silence.

There is a simple reason why this government is so deeply unpopular. Albertans are asking the government to stop the self-interested focus on their own jobs and focus instead on jobs for Albertans. Far from taking on the greatest challenge that most of us will face in our lifetime, this government shirked their responsibilities and failed to meet the moment with Budget 2021. Albertans are noticing.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

History

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Cancel culture has changed the way many look at the actions of the past. Failing to remember our history accurately is a disservice to history, because it is the past; nothing more, nothing less. We cannot erase it nor change it, and we can only learn from it so that our actions can be better today and tomorrow.

At what point do we need to stop looking at yesterday through today's lens, Mr. Speaker? Life is hard, and life was certainly hard for those people in the events that occurred in the past. However, history should be debated, not cancelled. By cancelling history, it stops us from having serious and thoughtful, balanced discussions. The truth is that we need to learn from the good and the bad. This emotionally driven movement to cancel anything or anyone who doesn't live up to this utopian standard is wrong, and quite frankly it's unachievable.

Whether we like it or not, throughout history and today we are all human beings with the ability to accomplish amazing feats and the potential to cause mass destruction and human suffering. If we removed every person who has ever made a mistake throughout the course of history, we'd have nobody in the history books. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I would argue that we would have nobody in this Assembly if we all had to be held to this unachievable standard. They say that history repeats itself, and I have no interest in going back to the Stone Age by repeating the horrors of history that have directly impacted my family.

I believe in our Constitution, and, yes, Mr. Speaker, I believe that all people have the freedom to their opinion, even those whose opinions are different than my own. This hollow moral superiority

of cancel culture must stop. It is destroying history and humanity as we know it.

Kosher Food Availability in Correctional Facilities

Mr. Dach: Mr. Speaker, Rabbi Ari Drelich, who happens to be seated today in the gallery, leads the Chabad Lubavitch synagogue in my constituency. He's a very dedicated and highly respected religious leader in this city. Over more than 30 years of service he had made regular chaplaincy visits to inmates in correctional facilities, including those of the Jewish faith.

While meeting with Jewish inmates in Alberta correctional facilities, he observed that kosher food options were not being properly made available to them as they are in Canadian federal correctional institutions and other provincial institutions as well, so he wrote to the previous UCP Justice minister to raise the issue and ask for a meeting to discuss the matter in hopes of reaching a simple and satisfactory solution. The minister's letter in response claimed that they were in compliance with kosher food obligations and further indicated that the authority they had consulted with verified that rice cakes were an acceptable kosher food alternative. The minister further advised Rabbi Drelich that if he or inmates felt that this was not acceptable, they could exercise their right to complain to the Alberta Human Rights Commission or file a Charter challenge with the courts.

Rabbi Drelich wrote back to the current Minister of Justice once again to ask for a short meeting to properly explain how the provision of kosher food was not in religious compliance and hoped to obtain a quick and simple resolution to what he considered to be a breach of Charter-protected religious rights. Once again in response the current Minister of Justice directed Rabbi Drelich to the previous minister's claim that his ministry was in compliance with kosher requirements and recommended he begin a very expensive and multiyear legal effort through a Human Rights Commission complaint or a Charter of Rights court challenge.

For a government that prides itself on red tape reduction and good relations with our volunteer sector, this is a very counterproductive and disrespectful position for the minister to take in response to a very dignified and simple request. He simply asked: may I have a short meeting to make my case?

This can be solved without cost. Minister, please meet with Rabbi Drelich.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Grande Prairie Residents' Achievements

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise in the Assembly this afternoon and share some good news. That's right, some good news. I know this past year has been challenging, and I hear regularly from my constituents that they are looking for some good news, for some things to celebrate.

I'm inspired by the wisdom of my late grandfather Leo Wood, who was always an encouragement to those around him in his steady calm no matter what challenge came his way, Mr. Speaker. His generation lived through so much adversity, and I believe that the resilience he demonstrated was a direct benefit of the lessons he learned through his challenging days, including surviving the Great Depression and World War II. He could always see beyond the challenge before him.

To start, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to highlight my good friend Tenille Townes. Tenille is nominated for her first Juno award in the category of country album of the year. Tenille is a singer-songwriter – you guessed it – born in Grande Prairie, Alberta, who has achieved

numerous successes and continues to be recognized for her incredible talent and her philanthropic commitments. It's notable that, possibly for the first time ever, 3 of the 5 nominees for the award this year are from Alberta: Lindsay Ell from Calgary, Mackenzie Porter from Medicine Hat, and, my personal favourite, Tenille Townes from Grande Prairie.

1:40

And I have more good news, Mr. Speaker. I recently had the pleasure of attending a meeting with Darren Foley, a teacher from Grande Prairie and the founder of the 3D children's charity. Through his charity Mr. Foley has raised over \$1 million since 1999. Students from three school districts participate in hockey and soccer tournaments which raise money to support their peers who are dealing with serious medical conditions such as MS, muscular dystrophy, and cancer. This funding provides support for travel and medical equipment for these students and their families.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank these two tremendous Albertans for inspiring me in a time of COVID and for giving Grande Prairie two more reasons to be proud of our community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has a statement to make.

Rental Housing

Member Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a difficult time in our province. The oil price collapse and pandemic have left many people struggling to make ends meet. Yet these crises have not led to a significant drop in rental rates on the private market, and many Albertans have seen their rents rise enormously. While provinces such as British Columbia have a rent freeze in place until the end of 2021, this government has done as little as possible for renters in Alberta. Last spring Alberta's eviction ban and rent freeze lasted just one month and four days, from March 27 to April 30, 2020. I know the UCP government is a little hazy on this subject, so let me be clear. The COVID-19 pandemic did not end on April 30. It's not over today.

Mr. Speaker, the truth is that this government does not have the best interests of renters at heart. As soon as the eviction ban was lifted, an MLA on their own benches was trying to put one of his tenants out on the street, and unfortunately this is just not a case of one bad apple. Since the moment they came into office, the UCP government has targeted renters for huge cuts to help pay for their \$4.7 billion corporate handout. In Budget 2019 the UCP cut funding for rental assistance by 24 per cent. Budget 2020 did not allocate any new capital funding for affordable housing.

Mr. Speaker, my riding of Calgary-Buffalo has the highest percentage of renters in the province, and my constituents are worried about their future. It's time this government finally did something to help them. Will they do the right thing and reintroduce an eviction ban and rent freeze until the end of the pandemic?

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Central Peace-Notley.

Alberta in Canada

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have become increasingly frustrated with their federal government. As I've met with my constituents, I hear the same theme over and over again: they're tired of the federal government undermining our economy, they're tired of money leaving this province and the federal government transferring funds to other provinces, they're tired of the

federal government taking us for granted, and they're tired of Alberta accepting it. Alberta is and has been pivotal to the prosperity of Canada as a whole for generations. Every province in this country benefits from the success of our economy, especially our oil and gas sector. But there is a deep-seated resentment for Alberta by some in this country based on misinformation, and it is being pandered to by our Liberal federal government.

Today we are on the eve of the Federal Court's decision on whether the federal government can impose a carbon tax on the provinces. We hope that the Supreme Court makes the right decision because we know this is an overreach. But if the courts rule in the favour of the federal Liberals, we will need to respond with strength and determination.

This is a federal government that has cancelled much-needed pipelines. They've allowed our largest trading partner to retroactively cancel pipelines without so much as a whimper. They regulated the Energy East project until it died, leaving us in the precarious position where the shutting down of a pipeline in the U.S. could cause enormous consequences in eastern Canada. They've allowed our resources to be land-locked from the rest of the world. We've had enough of the attitude that tells us that oil and gas pipelines are unacceptable but cash pipelines from oil and gas revenues are free to flow east. Pipelines are the safest, most environmental and economical way to transport much-needed oil and gas.

We have to realize that we will never be offered a fair deal without demanding it. What a fair deal looks like is up to Albertans, but we know from the experience of other provinces that we can assert our place far more effectively by at least considering ideas like a provincial pension plan, a provincial police force, opting out of federal programs in exchange for full compensation, triggering a referendum on equalization negotiations, the collection of our own taxes, playing a larger role in international relations, and more. Albertans aren't asking for special treatment; they demand fair treatment. They demand that we stand up to our federal government because Albertans have had enough.

Value-added Agricultural Industries

Ms Sweet: In a time of economic uncertainty, where the need for diversification is clear, agriculture can and should be an economic leader to guide the province. Unfortunately, this government is taking rural Alberta for granted and is leaving the agriculture industry behind. The UCP refuses to make initiatives and invest to diversify the agricultural economy. When asked about attracting value-added processing investment to Alberta, the minister of agriculture said that he is actively trying. Mr. Speaker, Albertan farmers do not want their government to merely try. They want their government to act.

On the subject of protein processing, Alberta is rich in pulse crops. If they were able to process these proteins in Alberta, there would be significant potential for economic growth, opportunities, and jobs. In Manitoba the provincial government provided a significant multimillion-dollar investment through various programs and grants to help build the Merit foods processing facility in Winnipeg. We see no such development or investment in Alberta. Chris Chivilo has been trying to build a pulse processing plant in Bowden for the last number of years. I must point out that that's the minister's own riding. The economic opportunity in pulse processing is clear. Strategic and targeted investment by the government could generate millions of dollars in return and help create thousands of jobs.

Yet the UCP refuses to act. The UCP would rather prioritize spending millions on a failed war room, all the while ignoring 11 agricultural producers' call for investment in AgriStability. Maybe

the minister will act tomorrow and sign onto the plan, but knowing this government, it will only be a small part of the plan and not the whole plan, ignoring the very people who were the economic drivers during COVID. Empty talking points on values from the UCP mean nothing without tangible action to back it up. This UCP government spends more time taking credit for federal investment in Alberta agriculture, such as the recent irrigation investment, than they spend on actual work of their own.

So I encourage the UCP to stop actively trying to generate investment and simply start acting. It is time to take some economic leadership. Investing in plant protein processing is just one of the many opportunities for Alberta's agricultural industry. It's time this government listens and stops ignoring rural Alberta.

The Speaker: I might remind members of the Assembly that there's a long-standing tradition of members' statements going uninterrupted for any reason.

The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to share that my thoughts and prayers are with the DeLeeuw, Elzinga, and Sweitzer families today that their guys will be found safely.

Electric Power Prices

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, last year, shortly after our election, I was proud to stand and celebrate the decision to maintain an energy-only electricity system. After the NDP reign of tyranny, that saw rapidly rising costs and major uncertainty for our electricity system, I was proud that our government committed to correcting those failures and restoring confidence in Alberta's electricity system. Alberta energy consumers once benefited from some of the cheapest delivered electricity costs in North America. However, high costs are currently impacting large industrial users, who we rely on to employ many rural Albertans and help our province in its quest to diversify.

Poor decisions and planning made in years past have made our electricity system today a complete boondoggle. The reality is, Mr. Speaker, that the cost of electricity transmission and distribution varies widely across the province. Many of my constituents were deeply concerned that a number of utility providers recently requested a higher rate of return on equity, especially when they are already benefiting from a regulated system. At the same time, it was disappointing to hear that the AESO was conducting a tariff redesign during this extremely challenging period of economic uncertainty. The timing for further impact on industry couldn't be worse.

It's also important to note that rural Albertans are generally subject to double and even triple the cost in delivered electricity compared to Albertans in urban settings. This can no longer be tolerated. Our rural communities, local businesses, and the industries that support them need to know that the government is going to start making decisions to bring stability and common sense back to our electricity market. Constituents and employers in West Yellowhead know that fixing the errors made in the past will not happen overnight, but they are relying on our government to do a fulsome review on all aspects of the electricity sector in order to right the ship. We need to engage with stakeholders across the province and commit today to develop a path which will restore confidence, fairness, and competitive pricing for Alberta's industries and all electricity consumers.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition has the call.

**COVID-19 Statistics and Modelling
Restrictions on Restaurants and Bars**

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We are at a critical point in this pandemic. Vaccines are on the way but not fast enough. Meanwhile cases are rising, and the increased spread of variants is alarming. People want to know where this is going so they can make informed decisions for their families, their businesses, and their health. They don't have case projections; the Premier does. They don't have hospitalization projections; the Premier does. They don't have R value projections; the Premier does. Can the Premier tell us where AHS is forecasting each of these metrics will be three weeks from now?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from the hon. Leader of the Opposition. She and Albertans are right to be concerned about the growth in COVID-19 in this spring season, increasingly driven by variants of concern, primarily in this province by the B.1.1.7 variant, which is 40 to 80 per cent more contagious and which, some evidence suggests, can also be more lethal. But on the good-news side, we have inoculated approaching half a million Albertans. Many hundreds of thousands also have natural immunity from prior infection, and we need to get more vaccines as soon as possible.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, here's a question on benchmarks. We know hospitalizations will come down as more older Albertans are vaccinated: a good thing. We know those numbers are two weeks behind the case counts, however. Meanwhile evidence is emerging that roughly 10 per cent of COVID infections carry some form of long-term health impact regardless of hospitalization. Will the Premier consider amending his benchmark triggers for increasing or decreasing restrictions to be more focused on the number of infections?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, I will bring that forward to the chief medical officer as we consider a framework for the next and, we hope, last phase of this pandemic. I agree that Albertans do want and need predictability. Unfortunately, this is not a predictable situation. We've now seen the introduction in British Columbia of the so-called Brazilian variant, which is very worrisome.

With respect to long COVID, it is a very concerning medical condition that can affect people for months at a time, and that is something that we must address as well.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan is once again closing bars and restaurants out of caution. Ontario, while ignoring doctors' calls to do the same, is at least moving restaurant workers up in the priority line for vaccination. Meanwhile back here our CMO says that safety protocols in some Alberta restaurants are inadequate to prevent viral spread from even a single person. In the event that the province has to reimpose restrictions in bars and restaurants, will the Premier commit today to using a portion of his COVID contingency fund to support those businesses and their workers?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the last thing that any of us want to see, at least on this side of the House, are additional restrictions that would destroy people's livelihoods, their ability to care for their families, and create other negative social consequences, mental health and other challenges. However, should we need to take

additional measures to protect our health care system and avoid large-scale preventable deaths, we will certainly step forward with additional support for both the businesses and individuals affected.

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

Environmental Monitoring and Reporting

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, at the outset of this pandemic the Premier used public health orders to justify the suspension of environmental monitoring in the oil sands for months. Then last August he cut the budget for monitoring by 25 per cent: no field work on the Athabasca River, no studies on tailings ponds, no water quality checks in Wood Buffalo national park. Today a new report from the School of Public Policy at the U of C reveals that Alberta was the only province in Canada to suspend all monitoring across multiple sectors. Premier, why did you use this pandemic as a smokescreen to stop protecting Alberta's environment?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I did no such thing; neither did this government. In fact, the relief provided by the Alberta Energy Regulator with respect to delaying reporting requirements at the height of the pandemic a year ago represented about 2 to 5 per cent of all regulatory monitoring. The Leader of the Opposition just said that it was all environmental regulations. According to the AER it's 2 to 5 per cent, and this is because, to comply with COVID regulations, they couldn't take teams out in helicopters and send people out in trucks in groups. There were practical challenges, but all of that monitoring is still required.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, other provinces also have major industries and also had reporting requirements that couldn't be met because of COVID. What did that mean for their environmental rule changes? Well, Quebec made 13 changes; Newfoundland, 13; B.C., 12; Saskatchewan, 16; Ontario, nine. But in Alberta? Fifty-four changes. Premier, why did you feel the need to act so aggressively to undermine Alberta's environmental protections?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, no regulations were suspended. No rules were changed. We simply allowed, in the case of the independent Alberta Energy Regulator, greater flexibility in reporting timelines because of the impact of the pandemic.

In terms of the comparison between Alberta and other provinces, the Leader of the Opposition should know that Alberta has far more regulatory requirements and reporting requirements than other provinces in part because we have far more heavy industry that is subject to environmental regulation.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Premier's Washington envoy told the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce that we can ramp up trade and investment with the U.S. by promoting Alberta's environmental record. He said: it may be challenging, but Americans need to be reminded of the positive steps Alberta has taken. It seems like one hand really doesn't know what the other is doing. Premier, tell us exactly: how does leading the country in cancelling environmental protections help promote Alberta's environmental record in Washington?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the rules of this place, quite suitably, do not allow me to accuse a member of deliberately misleading the House, but I sometimes have to wonder whether there is wilful ignorance on the part of members. The member knows perfectly well – there is no question – that no environmental protections were cancelled, repealed, or suspended. Some reporting timelines were

adjusted at the height of the pandemic, which was the responsible thing to do in a province with the most robust environmental regulations in Canada.

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

Coal Development Policies

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, for months Albertans have told the Premier that they don't want strip mines on the eastern slopes, but today there are thousands of kilometres of natural wilderness in the Livingstone area being ripped up to build roads for coal exploration. According to an analysis by CPAWS the density of this development has surpassed the legal limits established by the Land Stewardship Act in 2018. Premier, these coal companies are accelerating their damage to the eastern slopes under your watch. Why won't you stop them?

Mr. Kenney: To be absolutely clear, Mr. Speaker, the policy of Alberta today with respect to mining and coal mining in particular is the same as it was three or four years ago under her government, a government that approved the construction and commissioning of new coal mines. In this province we believe in balancing the protection of our environment with responsible resource development. That continues to be our primary goal, and we will be holding consultations on details of coal policy commencing on March 29.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier knows that neither the locations nor the volumes were anywhere close to what this government is doing. Either way, we've heard Albertans, yet this government continues to accelerate development. When asked about the roads, the government said, "No comment" and then, "Don't worry; it'll be cleaned up when they're all done." But Lorne Fitch, a biologist at U of C, says that any suggestion of restoration on the slopes is a leap of faith. He says: in some cases, trying to reclaim them does more damage to the landscape. Premier, you can end this today. Will you commit to passing our bill to stop coal exploration on the eastern slopes, as Albertans have demanded?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's just a farrago of made-up, fake facts. The truth is this. They commissioned the Coalspur mine near Hinton. And you know what? Kudos to the NDP. It's one time they stood up for working people. They began the joint review process over the Grassy project, which is a latent mine. The proposal is to recommission that mine. It operated safely in the past. That is before a joint federal-provincial environmental review process. That is exactly how these things should be managed, not with hysterical politics but with a careful consideration of the regulatory issues by independent regulators.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, on that subject, we are, in fact, four days away from the start of this Premier's supposed consultations, and I have just a couple of small questions for him. Why is there no information online? How is the consultation structured? Who's allowed in the consultation? Who's presenting from the government? How will Albertans' feedback be considered? How will the consultation be viewed publicly? How many sessions will there be? What exactly are Albertans being asked? When will there be a decision? How long will they go on? And, finally, given all these questions is the Premier at all surprised that nobody trusts this process or him to protect our mountains?

2:00

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

Mrs. Savage: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for that question. I'm really looking forward to the NDP participation in the consultations starting on Monday because the NDP can explain to Albertans why what they're saying in this Chamber is so different than their record when they were in government, why the NDP are now opposed to mining on the eastern slopes when they approved four exploration projects in category 2 lands. They wrote a letter to the AER saying that surface mining is not prohibited on category 2 lands. We can't wait for the NDP to justify their new position.

Community Facility Enhancement Program

Member Irwin: The heart of Alberta is in our community organizations, where dedicated Albertans come together to support their neighbours. This sense of community appears to be lost on the UCP, who has slashed funding for the community facility enhancement program, CFEP, by 50 per cent. Community leagues rely on grants from this program to do essential work. Today I was joined by passionate volunteers from our community leagues who know first-hand the impact that these deep cuts will have. Premier, simple question: will you reverse your cuts today and ensure that community organizations can survive?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the entire – all of the above is false and misleading. To say that there's been a 50 per cent cut is completely incorrect. The government continues to provide \$37.1 million in funding through this program, and we continue to support these important community organizations. At the same time I know that the NDP – if you actually look at the basic difference in the fiscal plan between this government and the NDP, they would drive our deficit up \$8 billion to \$10 billion higher. You know how they want to make Albertans pay for that? With a sales tax.

Member Irwin: Premier, these communities rely on CFEP to maintain infrastructure. If you'd go to those communities, you would see that. It's community halls, it's playgrounds, it's gardens, it's outdoor rinks, it's spray parks, and it's so much more. The cuts that you and your government are inflicting are going to hurt these organizations, and some of them are in jeopardy of shutting down. More than ever we need to be supporting our community organizations. Why would you pick now, in the middle of a pandemic, with all the challenges we face, to cut their funding?

Mr. Kenney: Well, in point of fact, Mr. Speaker, under this government Alberta has the highest levels of funding for community infrastructure in the history of this province: over \$10 billion in the fiscal year now ending; \$21 billion in the three years ahead, that will help to create 50,000 direct jobs, 40,000 indirect jobs, build important community infrastructure all across the province. That includes the \$37 million annually in the community facility enhancement program. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Member Irwin: Community leagues want spray parks. They want outdoor rinks. They don't want war rooms. Your government claims to care about lives and livelihoods, but the letter signed by more than 150 community organizations about these cuts, a letter that I'll table shortly, states that resources from your government are needed to maintain these essential pieces of infrastructure. In fact, the executive director of the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues joined me today, and she said that this funding does more than that. It helps

neighbours connect, it supports local businesses, and it improves community health. At a time when you should be investing in communities, why are you attacking them?

Speaker's Ruling

Addressing Questions through the Chair

The Speaker: Order. I have provided caution on a number of occasions to members of the opposition when using the first person in questions. The Premier is not attacking anyone personally. For the opposition members to continue to say, "Why are you doing these things?" creates disorder in the Assembly. This is now the third time that a correction has been provided. I hope that in the future more will be done.

Community Facility Enhancement Program

(continued)

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, it actually doesn't create disorder because you don't hear any heckling coming from the government side of the benches. What you hear is constant division, fear, and misleading comments coming from the opposition.

Thirty-seven million dollars will continue to be funded in this important program every year as part of our \$21 billion capital investment over the next three years, a record level of investment in community infrastructure. But, Mr. Speaker, I think Albertans also understand that money doesn't grow on trees, and we don't want to raise taxes on Albertans to pay for NDP levels of spending on everything all the time.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Venture Capital Investment in Alberta

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Investment in technology and innovation will be critical to Alberta's economic recovery. Investments in tech mean investments in health care, agriculture, energy, entertainment, and more. We've all heard in this House that the province has set a record this year in venture capital investment. Can the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board tell this House how Alberta performed year over year when it comes to venture capital investment?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. The member is right; 2020 was a precedent-setting year for venture capital investment in the province of Alberta. Alberta's tech sector reported \$445 million in venture capital investment in 2020. That was a hundred per cent increase from 2019, and despite a decrease across Canada overall, Alberta not only increased its venture capital attraction; it doubled it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. It is great to hear that Alberta is seeing record levels of investment in technology. Technology is a key component of economic diversification and will play a critical role in our economic recovery. We continue to hear more and more success stories of varying size coming out of a number of Alberta's tech subsectors. Can the minister tell the House about some of the biggest success stories in Alberta's tech sector last year?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. There were so many success stories that there's no doubt I will leave some out. We saw a variety of large venture capital deals in Alberta through 2020. Some of the biggest were Calgary-based Neo Financial, who raised \$50 million in funding. Also in Calgary Symend raised \$73 million. The largest deal last year was from Edmonton-based Jobber, who raised \$76 million last year. The tech sector is alive and growing in the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Investment is one thing; it is another thing to see investment translated into jobs. Jobs are what Albertans need. After years of economic mismanagement and stagnation under the previous anti-jobs government and more recently with a global pandemic, a financial and commodity crash, Albertans are looking for signs of hope and optimism. What can the minister tell us about job growth in the tech sector?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to say this. Albertans are looking for optimism, and today we got a report from Desjardins, who are now projecting Alberta to lead the national economy with 7.8 per cent GDP growth in 2021 and job growth of 4.7 per cent. Yes, we have seen significant job growth in the tech sector. We're expecting mCloud and Infosys to commit to bring hundreds of jobs, high-paying tech jobs, to the province of Alberta in 2021.

School Construction Capital Plan and Calgary

Ms Hoffman: It's really disappointing, and it brings back feelings of the 1990s, when we weren't investing in infrastructure as a province: that was CBE trustee Julie Hrdlicka speaking about this government's historic decision not to invest in the students of Calgary. No new schools, no modernizations, no renovations or upgrades for the largest board, serving the largest number of students in Alberta. How can the minister possibly justify betraying Calgary public families?

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

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I find it shocking that a former trustee does not understand the process that is involved in building schools. Of course, every school division puts forth their capital plan, a three-year capital plan. They itemize whether they have a first, second, third request. The member opposite should know that Calgary Catholic's first request was what indeed they did receive. Calgary public did receive a number of schools in previous budgets, and I'm happy to itemize those as well.

Ms Hoffman: Given that CBE trustee Trina Hurdman said that, quote, these are not things that are just nice to have or filling schools with bells and whistles and given that the Minister of Education has time and time again failed to put children first by levelling deep cuts to education with no care about the impacts that those have on families and given that the Education minister has written off Calgary public students by giving them nothing for infrastructure and cutting learning supports, does the minister get how this historic slap in the

face to Calgary public students hurts them and Calgary's potential? They're not asking for the moon. They're asking for schools.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to report that in Calgary there are a number of schools being built: Evanston elementary school, a CBE school, creating 600 spaces; north Calgary high school, another CBE school, creating 1,800 spaces; Auburn Bay middle school, creating 900 spaces; Auburn Bay elementary, creating 450 spaces, both again CBE schools. I had the pleasure of speaking with Marilyn Dennis, who is the board chair for CBE, just this morning on another matter. She didn't raise the issues that the member opposite is raising to me.

Ms Hoffman: Given that Calgary families are, given that CBE trustees are, given that it's all over the news, Minister, given that this isn't the first time in recent memory that you've betrayed the students of Calgary – this is another time where Calgary is being ignored by this government – and given that this minister failed to do what was necessary to stop major outbreaks of COVID-19 in Calgary schools and schools right across this province . . .

Mr. Jason Nixon: Point of order.

Ms Hoffman: . . . the minister's budget is a failure. She already told us her business plan wasn't approved by cabinet, so what's her story about the capital plan? Did the minister even ask for Calgary public schools? Did she get denied, or did she fail to even ask for Calgary public schools?

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:11.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, our capital plan is investing \$1.6 billion in school infrastructure, building 62 schools, which are already under way. On top of it we announced 14 more new schools; six of them are in Calgary, creating more than 5,000 students spaces. In fact, the previous Education minister said, "I have demands from all over the province in regard to building new schools . . . Under due consideration based on enrolment, based on need, based on geography, we have the deliberations over schools." That's what exactly . . .

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

Child Care Funding

Ms Pancholi: One week. One week until the pilot program for universal, quality, affordable, \$25-per-day child care will end, a program that created 1,740 new child care spaces throughout rural and urban Alberta and served over 7,500 children, a program that was overwhelmingly positively received and evaluated in this government's own third-party report, a program that is ending as child care fees are going up. To the minister: rather than make all Alberta families winners by expanding this critical child care program, why has your government chosen to make them all losers by ending it?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, this was a three-year pilot program implemented by the former government that benefited very few children and parents across the province. While the members opposite want to cherry-pick data like they cherry-picked child care centres and parents to support, I would like

to provide some additional data, like quotes from parents and centres that were actually taking part in that pilot.

Personally, I know of many families that have a household income of over \$350,000/year that receive the taxpayer-subsidized daycare. I am frustrated that my tax dollars are being spent by subsidizing the daycare costs for some of the wealthiest Albertans.

Ms Pancholi: Given that families from across the province have actually described this program as life changing and have shared heartbreaking stories of having to choose between child care and working because this program is ending and given that every change this government has made has reduced the quality of child care and made it more expensive in Alberta and given that the minister keeps saying that this is about, quote, parent choice, but if parents can't afford, find, or access child care, they don't have choice, to the minister: why has your government chosen to make decimating child care your signature policy?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, what the member opposite is saying is absolutely, completely untrue. We know that affordable child care is, in fact, life changing for parents who need it, and that's exactly what we've done. By changing our subsidy program, we are investing in the highest subsidy program outside of Quebec in the entire country of Canada, supporting parents right across Alberta, in every single community, in the licensed space, centre, or day home of their choice. We're going to continue to invest in child care because we know that it is an important part of getting Alberta parents back to work.

Ms Pancholi: Well, given that child care fees have risen above the cost of increase in subsidies and given that reducing access to quality, affordable early learning will have long-lasting impacts on the outcomes for young children and will set back our economic recovery and given that lack of access to child care is and always has been one of the greatest barriers to women's full participation in the workforce and is something women have been fighting for for decades in this country, to the minister: does the minister as a woman in politics really want her legacy to be ending the first real progress we've made in this province towards universal, affordable, quality child care? This is your last chance, Minister. On behalf of working parents in Alberta, will you reverse your decision to end this program?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, every province in this country does things differently when it comes to affordable, high-quality, accessible child care to support the parents in their province. What I have committed to do is to not tell half of the providers in Alberta that we know better than them. I don't want to put more than 60 per cent of our private operators out of work, like the members opposite do. That's because we know that operators and early childhood educators and Alberta parents, they know best. We're going to continue to invest in affordable, high-quality child care right across this province in a way that supports parents' needs.

Kosher Food Availability in Correctional Facilities

Mr. Dach: Mr. Speaker, Rabbi Ari Drelich has joined this Assembly today in hopes of convincing the Minister of Justice to do the right thing. The rabbi became aware months ago that the kosher food options provided to inmates at federal correctional facilities and those in other provinces are not offered in Alberta. He wrote to the minister about this issue on multiple occasions and has

received nothing helpful back. To the minister: will you commit today to immediately assessing kosher food options available in these correctional facilities and make changes to bring Alberta in line with other provinces and federal inmates?

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question. The opposition was heckling so loud that I actually couldn't hear it today, Mr. Speaker, which shows why the opposition should spend some time actually crafting their questions instead of focusing on yelling so loud that the government can't hear the question. They'd probably get better answers. How about we start with that?

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm always happy to bring forward the concerns of constituencies. Given that after months of frustration and no movement on the issue of kosher food in Alberta correctional facilities the minister actually had the audacity to advise Rabbi Drelich to file a complaint with the Human Rights Commission and given that this response is dismissive and downright insulting to not only the rabbi and inmates he's seeking to support but also to the entire Jewish community and given that the Premier has repeatedly deemed himself a friend of Alberta's Jewish community, will the minister or the Premier rise in this House today and apologize for dismissing the concerns raised by Rabbi Drelich?

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

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much, and thank you very much for bringing this forward. We will make sure that the Minister of Justice has all of the information he needs in order to answer you properly. Thank you.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the rabbi has been nothing but respectful in his communications with the government and given that he only asked me to bring these concerns forward to this House today after giving the government months to act on the matter of kosher food in correctional facilities and given that even with the disrespect shown by the government the rabbi is still working towards a constructive solution, will the minister agree to meet with the rabbi and myself following question period today or at another convenient time very soon? Yes or no?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question. We can't talk about the absence of members in this place, but it should be understood that, because of COVID protocols, not all ministers can be in the House at a given time. I'll certainly take this matter up with the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General. I can assure the hon. member that I speak frequently to most of the rabbis of Jewish congregations and representatives of most of the Jewish organizations in Alberta, with whom I am pleased to have a very close relationship, and none of them have ever raised this issue before, but we would certainly be happy to look into it and see if this issue can be addressed.

Drug Overdose Prevention

Ms Sigurdson: This UCP government left hundreds of Albertans to die alone by cancelling an overdose prevention app developed by

AHS back in June, and now instead of activating the AHS app that we already have, the Minister of Health is spending \$325,000 of taxpayers' money on a sole-sourced contract for a new app that doesn't work. It will be months before this new app comes online, and even then it won't work outside of Calgary. Minister, more than three Albertans die of preventable overdoses every single day. Why won't you activate the AHS app immediately?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, while the members opposite continue to focus on the negative, this is a positive story. This app is far safer than the one that the members opposite are talking about. Our action includes testing this app in Calgary this summer, where rates of overdose in suburban areas are high, before we expand this program to the rest of the province. When it comes to the proponent, Aware360 has had a relationship with the government for 14 years, including lone-worker safety technology. They have the skills, they have the experience, and we are proud to partner with this Alberta company.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that Aware360, the company that got this massive government contract without having to bid for it, is a client of Nick Koolsbergen, the Premier's former chief of staff, and given that he is the lobbyist who gave skyrocketing car insurance bills to Albertans and Hawaiian getaways to UCP insiders, why was the Minister of Health so indifferent to the hundreds of Albertans dying of preventable overdoses until the Premier's best buddy came looking for some easy money?

2:20

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, as I've already made very clear, Aware360, this proponent, has had a relationship with the government of Alberta for 14 years. That relationship, as I've said, included technology for lone-worker safety and has transferable aspects to this app. They have the skills. They have the experience. We're proud to partner with this Alberta company. This is a good-news story. We are stepping up with solutions to support folks who need it.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that \$325,000 is only the down payment on an app that doesn't work and Aware360 is going to keep sending bills to taxpayers to operate it when it finally starts working and given that the minister and his staff have refused to answer exactly how much this giveaway to the Premier's friends will cost taxpayers, to the minister: does it sit right with your moral compass to help the Premier's buddies get rich off Albertans' misery? And why won't you activate the AHS overdose prevention app today?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, you know, I was in opposition for many years. I asked a lot of tough questions. But that kind of defamatory – that's an abuse of the privilege of this place. Those allegations are disgusting. I've never heard of this company. I have no idea what she is talking about. She just alleged that I am somehow involved in a corrupt relationship with an organization I have never heard about and a contract I have zero awareness over.

Mr. Speaker, typical of the NDP. They always overreach. Shame on them. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Livestock Transportation Industry Support

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All levels of the food supply chain have been essential to ensuring Albertans are fed. COVID-19 has disrupted the supply chain. Farmers have needed to feed livestock longer, which has caused disruptions throughout, including for cattle

haulers. This transportation of livestock is critically important to ensuring Albertans are fed. But companies like Riverstone Transport did not qualify for the critical worker benefit. To the minister: how is this acceptable? Why is the government not supporting the Alberta beef industry, the supply chain, and the impacts from COVID?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Labour and Immigration.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We appreciate the work that everyone has done during the COVID-19 pandemic. More than 80 per cent of the workforce continue to work and were deemed as essential services. In developing the critical worker benefit, we focused on those who were doing critical roles in the delivery of front-line services in health care, social services, and education, including those who are supporting our food production and supply chains as well as our health care supply chains. We thank everyone who does the work, including farmers and others in the agricultural sector. We focused on these critical workers.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister just said that it was for the agricultural supply chain and given that Riverstone Transport believed they were eligible for the critical worker benefit because they are part of the driving sector that transports food, but they were told that the government only considers cattle to be food after it's processed, and given that all hauling and transporting of cattle is evidently a part of the supply chain, they should be treated as such. Again to the minister: does this government not understand how the agricultural supply chain in this province works at all? How can people who transport cattle not be considered an essential part of the supply chain?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's great to hear members stand up for folks in the cattle industry, an industry that's so important to the province of Alberta. I'm not sure they did that one day while they were in government, but it's great to hear them stand up today and defend that industry. Cattle producers, those involved in the beef and cattle supply chains, have provided a tremendous service to Albertans during the pandemic, as they do year in, year out.

Ms Sweet: Well, now I'll ask the second minister. Given that that's the second minister that stood up and said that they appreciate this, they should qualify for the critical worker benefit. Given that when I ask about agriculture in this House, the questions and concerns come directly from farmers and producers; however, the UCP tends to respond that the agriculture minister is also a farmer, so whatever he does is therefore superior and given that this is a strange justification because as a farmer the minister should take the concerns of all farmers more seriously, to the minister of agriculture: who is advocating for farmers at the cabinet table? Why is the government abandoning workers in the beef industry and not...

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of agriculture has risen.

Mr. Dreeshen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a little disconcerting to see the NDP pay this much attention to agriculture because all of the farmers and ranchers and ag producers across the province that I've talked to remember the disastrous NDP Bill 6, their carbon tax. I think that when it comes to the over \$300 million that this government gives our farmers and ranchers when it comes to business risk management programs, the over \$47

million in ag recovery programs for our cattle industry and our hog producers – actually, we gave \$55 million to our grain farmers in insurance premiums for this year alone. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-North is the one with the call.

Postsecondary Education and STEM

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta recovery plan aims to create jobs and diversify the economy. Our government is investing in the future by supporting our students in postsecondary education to achieve their goals, particularly in science, technology, engineering, and math, otherwise known as STEM programs. Given that artificial intelligence and cybersecurity have become a critical part of the technology sector, to the Minister of Advanced Education: can you please inform this House on the importance of STEM education for our youth?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education has risen.

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. An excellent question from my colleague. Indeed, STEM is one of the fastest growing fields and disciplines, not just from an academic perspective but also in terms of economic opportunities, and we've implemented a number of initiatives to help strengthen development in that area. Most recently I had the opportunity to announce \$15 million in new funding over three years to support the development of 1,400 research-based internships with Mitacs, a nonprofit organization that works across Canada. This will help to strengthen and build the innovation capacity of our province and develop that talent right here at home.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that our government approved a new STEM charter school in Calgary that aims to motivate students in grades 7 to 12 to be innovators and technology creators and further given that STEM provides students with skills that will better prepare them for the virtual world and job market, to the same minister: what can Albertans expect from the Alberta 2030 initiative, and how will it increase access to postsecondary education?

The Speaker: The Minister of Advanced Ed.

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta 2030 initiative will achieve a lot of the objectives the member highlighted. The focus of the initiative, of course, is to build skills for jobs; that is to say, to ensure that all students, regardless of their discipline or their chosen career aspirations, develop the skills, knowledge, and competencies that they need to succeed in those aspirations. I'm looking forward to moving forward and implementing that strategy in the coming weeks, a very comprehensive strategy. It's my understanding that it's the first time in decades that Alberta will have a comprehensive postsecondary strategy.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that there is increased demand for STEM charter schools to serve women and youth and given that, based on a 2016 Canada census, women are up to 34 per cent of STEM bachelor degree holders aged 25 to 64 and further given that more women are becoming interested in pursuing a career in STEM, to the minister

of status of women: what are you doing to help women pursue a career in STEM?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of status of women.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Women and girls in STEM are critical to Alberta's prosperity, and we are so excited to be able to support women in pursuing this higher education and succeeding in fulfilling careers in STEM. It's also part of a stream, under the leaders in equality award of distinction program, open to women under the age of 30 pursuing studies in STEM. There's \$225,000 available. Ninety students will receive \$2,500 each for their studies. This funding is going to support those who are working to reduce gender discrimination in their communities and who are pursuing careers in underrepresented jobs.

Casino Revenue and Operations

Ms Phillips: Well-connected Conservative friends and lobbyists of the Premier and the UCP are trying to increase the split of gaming revenues in favour of casinos. This we know from the lobbyist registry. What we don't know is how much less money will be available to charities and parent groups who work until all hours of the morning to fund their communities and schools. In estimates the Minister of Finance appeared to rule out increases to the government's share of casino proceeds. Will he also assure nonprofits and charities that they won't lose any share of their casino proceeds?

2:30

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, through you to the member opposite, for the question because I want to assure charities and nonprofits in this province that there will be no change to the funding model. They can be assured of their historical take because they provide excellent service to Albertans, especially at a time of challenge such as a time of pandemic.

Ms Phillips: Thank you for that answer. Thank you to the minister for that answer. Now, will the minister, Mr. Speaker, also commit that there will be no funnelling or winnowing down of the number of groups that are eligible for casino funding moving forward? We've already heard about 40 per cent reductions to the facility enhancement grant. Will the minister ensure that more groups can access charitable gaming revenues, not fewer?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, in terms of the funding model there will be no changes coming forward. We have a good, defensible, predictable funding model in this province, and we are not reopening that. I can say this, that there is an ongoing review to ensure that charities that deliver to the most vulnerable in this province are prioritized at the highest point in terms of benefiting from gaming revenues. I believe that would be consistent with Albertans' priorities.

Ms Phillips: Given that UCP lobbyists are also, according to the formal record, lobbying to change the distribution of gaming proceeds and the conditions of volunteering in casino events and given that probably every parent in this province has worked a casino night to support a charity or a school group, to the Minister of Finance. People are worried about the future of the charitable gaming revenues, and they're worried about the future of their school groups

and their nonprofits, so will the minister commit to an open meeting with groups about his charitable gaming review and provide those assurances?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a parent who has been involved in casinos and bingos with school groups and 4-H groups, I know the value of the gaming model and the benefit it provides charities in this province. Again, we will continue to ensure that those charities and nonprofits that deliver real value, tangible value to Albertans will continue to be prioritized in our gaming model.

School Construction Capital Plan and Edmonton

Mr. Nielsen: Mr. Speaker, the infrastructure of a school affects how well students learn. It's a lot easier to focus on your studies when you know the building you're in is stable. If the building is dilapidated, not only do you want to not be there, but you might have concerns about safety, not to mention that students learn more when the teacher can spend more time with each student. Therefore, considering that there are two high schools in my constituency of Edmonton-Decore that are in serious need of renovations and that all three are at student capacity, to the minister: where is the critical funding to retrofit these schools?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, we take the safety of students and teachers very seriously. That's why in our \$20.7 billion capital plan, \$3 billion is meant for capital maintenance and renewal, which includes money for capital maintenance and renewal of schools, school projects. If the member opposite gives me the details of those two particular schools, we'll work with the school board because the grants are given through the school boards.

Mr. Nielsen: Given that in my constituency of Edmonton-Decore Queen Elizabeth high school is 60 years old and needs to be replaced and that at Archbishop O'Leary 200 to 300 students are turned away each year and forced to learn farther from home and given that many students are being forced to learn in portables there, which aren't ideal, especially in Alberta winters – this government completely ignored Edmonton public in this year's school capital plan, allocating zero funding for new schools in the entire city of Edmonton. Minister, how can you justify your colleague spending tens of millions of dollars on a discredited war room, yet can't bother to follow ...

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I need to correct the record. In fact, there are 11 schools currently under construction in Edmonton, creating approximately 10,000 student spaces. [interjections] They continue to heckle, but it doesn't change the fact that our schools are very well resourced. The school division that the member opposite is speaking about is Edmonton public schools. They have a budget of \$1.2 billion, and in that budget they will have capital maintenance and renewal funding. They have infrastructure funding. They have operations and maintenance funding.

Mr. Nielsen: Given that the UCP only announced design work funding for a Catholic high school in north Edmonton while it's pretty clear that Alberta needs new public and Catholic schools now, especially considering the situation faced by students in my constituency of Edmonton-Decore and elsewhere, and given that the student population is increasing and the minister doesn't even seem to care, choosing to make excuse after excuse as to why Edmonton was essentially shut out of this year's school capital plan,

Minister, what message is being sent to parents and students when government fails to prioritize quality schools in their communities?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier: 11 new schools coming under construction in Edmonton alone. When we look at Edmonton-Castle Downs, where an Edmonton metro school division highlighted that this was a huge need, this is actually in an NDP riding. Are they against building schools in their own ridings? This is unheard of. We build schools where they are most needed by school divisions, and they tell us what their highest priorities are. We are building schools where they're needed. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Agricultural Business Risk Management Programs

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, business risk management programs available to agricultural producers are a partnership with the federal and provincial governments to help ensure that farmers are able to weather the storm and Canadians will continue to enjoy a safe and secure food supply. COVID-19 has caused disruptions in Alberta's food supply chain. Currently hog producers are dealing with a backlog of more than 100,000 hogs. The AgriRecovery program has been triggered to support producers facing significant costs for maintaining market-ready hogs. To the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry: how do hog producers register for this AgriRecovery program?

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

Mr. Dreeshen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for that very important question. Our hog producers actually have till midnight tomorrow to apply for the \$4 million AgriRecovery program. That's something that – producers can receive a payment of up to \$22 per animal if they've had about 23 days of delay, where their animals have been set aside due to Olymel and processing plants being shut down. We are committed to making sure that hog producers have the supports that they need so they can do what they do best, which is creating high-quality, safe food products for families around the world.

Mr. van Dijken: Given that AgriStability is to provide producers with a whole-farm risk management tool and given that the federal government has proposed a change to AgriStability while this government states that these proposed changes are a short-term approach that won't address the bigger issue of providing a more effective and equitable risk management program and given that the government has announced its commitment to look for a replacement for AgriStability, to the minister: what progress has been made on an alternative, and how will this impact existing producers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of agriculture.

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member is right. AgriStability is a flawed program. Only about 3.6 per cent of farmers actually receive a benefit from it, so we owe it to the 96.4 per cent of farmers, ranchers, and producers across the province to get it right. We've actually been working with commodity groups, other provinces, and the federal government to design a margin-based insurance program, something that could replace AgriStability, that would actually be timely, where it wouldn't take two years to actually receive a benefit, that would be predictable, something where our farmers and ranchers would know how much they would receive in a year, and bankable.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that AgriInsurance provides both crop and hail insurance as well as livestock price insurance and given that on January 25 the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation, AFSC, announced that crop insurance premiums for Alberta farmers would be reduced 20 per cent, once again to the minister: how much money will this save Alberta farmers in 2021, and will farmers still have the same protections offered in previous years?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said, AgriRecovery had about \$50 million in support for our two livestock industries.

When it comes to crop insurance, it is our most successful business risk management program, but 72 per cent of farmers actually enrol in it. Yes, we did cut crop insurance by 20 per cent. That is about \$55 million in insurance premium savings for our farmers, and that would be about a 2,000-acre farmer receiving an \$8,000 premium benefit.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period. In 30 seconds or less we will return to the remainder of the daily Routine.

2:40

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Are there tablings? The hon. the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, followed by Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the requisite five copies of a petition, signed by 1,140 Albertans, calling on this government to continue the \$25-per-day child care early learning program.

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

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite copies of an article that I referenced last night during the budget debate, *The Plant Protein Ship Hasn't Sailed – but Time Is Running Out*.

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

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table on behalf of my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs the requisite five copies of letters signed by over 150 community leagues and community associations from Edmonton and from Calgary to the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women, the Premier, and Treasury Board and Finance, calling on this government to invest in the important contributions that are made by these groups and to stop the cuts to infrastructure grants that support these fantastic community organizations.

The Speaker: Are there others? Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite number of copies of two newspaper articles. I referred to quotes from these earlier today in my questions. The first is 'Not Asking for the Moon': CBE Trustees Worry What Lack of Capital Funding Means for Future, and the second is CBE Pushes Wish List Amid No Capital Funding and \$173 Million in Deferred Maintenance.

The Speaker: Any other tablings? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has a tabling.

Member Loyola: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I actually have 191 e-mails written to let me know that the United Nurses of Alberta is calling on the provincial government to reverse the proposed cuts to health care workers across Alberta, and I have the requisite number of copies as well.

I also have 36 e-mails from constituents upset about Bill 22 and the AIMCo pension takeover. I have the requisite number of copies of those as well.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of hon. Mr. Madu, Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, pursuant to the Statutes Repeal Act a report entitled Statutes Repeal Act: 2021 List.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at points of order. At 2:11 the Government House Leader raised a point of order.

Point of Order Addressing Questions through the Chair

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do rise on 23(h) as well as not speaking through the Speaker, which you spoke about earlier today. At the time that I raised that point of order, the Member for Edmonton-Glenora made allegations that the Minister of Education betrayed students. In fact, she said: you betrayed the students of Calgary. This is just shortly after you had cautioned the Official Opposition to try to speak through the Speaker.

Throughout this question period you continued to see the Official Opposition not speak through the Speaker. Now, it happens occasionally by accident. It's not an easy way to communicate, but it is the way that we communicate inside this Chamber. At this point it certainly appears to the government that it is a deliberate attempt to disobey the rules of this Chamber, but it is certainly ridiculous, and it should stop.

Let me be clear. The hon. the Minister of Education has not betrayed anybody. She's a hard-working Minister of Education, we're proud of her in this government, Mr. Speaker, and we will not tolerate people attacking her inside this Chamber directly. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Although I do not have access to the Blues – and I hope that that may help clear this up – what I do have is a transcript of what the member said. She said, and I quote: this minister failed to do what is necessary to stop major outbreaks of COVID-19 in Calgary schools. I submit to you that this is not a point of order but a matter of debate. As members of this Official Opposition caucus put forward 15 recommendations to better keep schools safe, this is a major point of debate between our caucus and the government caucus. We feel quite strongly that this minister and this government did not put in enough process, enough protections, enough money to help keep schools safe.

I submit to you, based on the information I have in front of me, that this is not a point of order but a continuation of debate.

The Speaker: Thank you for both of your submissions.

I would like to provide some additional comments with respect to the point of order raised by the hon. Government House Leader. I do have the benefit of the Blues, and at 2:10 the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora said the following:

Given that Calgary families are, given that CBE trustees are, given that it's all over the news, Minister, given that this isn't the first time in recent memory that you've betrayed the students of Calgary – this is another time where Calgary is being ignored by this government . . .

And then she goes on. A point of order is then called, and the hon. member concludes her remarks.

I agree with the hon. the Government House Leader's position that on occasion members inside the Assembly will say "that you" or "why did he" or otherwise, in the heat of battle, if you will, slip up. I have provided a number of clarifications around this issue over the past number of days, so that's why I'm a little bit frustrated today. But I would like to point you to page 610 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*.

Any Member participating in debate, whether during a sitting of the House or a Committee of the Whole, must address the Chair, not the House, a particular Minister or Member, the galleries, the television audience, or any other entity.

And this perhaps is the most important piece of the puzzle for today.

Since one of the basic principles of procedure in the House is that the proceedings be conducted in a respectful manner, Members are less apt to engage in heated exchanges and personal attacks when their comments are directed to the Chair rather than to another Member.

Again, I am willing to accept that from time to time and perhaps in this case the member specifically was speaking to the member and her concerns and perhaps it wasn't intentional to not speak through the chair, but I think that we have seen in other cases over the past couple of days that perhaps the usage was more intentional, which is why I've intervened.

I encourage all members of the Assembly: you can say what you would like to say; it just needs to be said in the correct manner.

I do not consider this a point of order. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded, but caution should be noted.

Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

Evening Sittings

65. Mr. Jason Nixon moved:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 4(1) for the duration of the 2021 spring sitting of the Second Session of the 30th Legislature the Assembly shall meet on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday evenings for consideration of government business unless the Government House Leader or a member of the Executive Council on the Government House Leader's behalf advises the Assembly that there shall be no evening sitting by providing notice during Notices of Motions in the daily Routine or at any time no later than 6 p.m. on the sitting day on which the evening sitting will be cancelled.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is a nondebatable motion.

[Government Motion 65 carried]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 54

Irrigation Districts Amendment Act, 2021

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

Mr. Dreeshen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move second reading of Bill 54, the Irrigation Districts Amendment Act, 2021.

The act sets out the purpose of irrigation districts, which is to convey and deliver water through its irrigation works; divert and use that water according to its water licence; construct, operate, and maintain its irrigation networks; and to maintain and promote its economic viability.

2:50

Now, Mr. Speaker, last fall this government partnered with eight irrigation districts and the Canada infrastructure bank to announce a historic \$815 million investment into irrigation infrastructure expansion and modernization. That project alone will create about 8,000 jobs in the province and also add more than 200,000 new irrigated acres; generate more than \$430 million annually to Alberta's GDP; develop greater water efficiency, allowing irrigation districts to do more with less when it comes to their existing water allocations; and, together with these eight irrigation districts, account for a combined 1.4 million acres of irrigated land in the province, 7,376 kilometres of irrigation conveyance, 41 reservoirs with storage capacity, and just over 1.1 million cubic metres of water. Just to put that into perspective, that's over 48,000 Olympic-sized swimming pools.

Now, Alberta's government provided a grant of \$244.5 million directly to this project. The Canada infrastructure bank provided a loan of \$407.5 million, and the eight irrigation districts themselves directly invested \$163 million, for that total investment of \$815 million, to modernize irrigation infrastructure and increase provincial water storage capacity. Breaking that down even more, Mr. Speaker, \$520 million of that deal was to develop two new off-stream reservoirs and to expand two more, and \$295 million was to modernize 56 rehabilitation projects.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

For the record I'd like to actually share the current water allocation and just, again, would like to remind the House that water allocation is not being changed. It is just being utilized even more efficiently. The irrigation district of the Bow River is 490,000 cubic metres; Eastern irrigation district, 761,000; Western, 190,500; Aetna, 9,000; Leavitt, 12,000; Lethbridge Northern, 334,450; Magrath, 34,000; Mountain View, 8,000; Raymond, 81,000; St. Mary River, 722,000; Taber, 158,000; United irrigation district, 65,988; and Ross Creek, 3,000.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I know that throughout the debate there will be lots of angst from the opposition saying that we are changing water allocation, but I just wanted to read that into the record, that these existing water allocations for these irrigation districts will remain the same.

This investment ultimately isn't just about growing specialty crops or achieving higher yields for our farmers and ranchers but is also about setting our agriculture sector up for generations of growth by attracting value-added food processing investment. Now, the irrigation industry contributes about \$3.6 billion annually to Alberta's GDP. The irrigation industry also provides some 56,000 jobs and around \$2.4 billion in annual labour income for Albertans. Investments in irrigation infrastructure see a return of nearly 300 per cent to, again, drive Alberta's agriculture sector. Irrigation will also play a critical role as we look to attract more value-added processing here in the province. Investors are looking for a jurisdiction that can provide a stable supply of crops, whether it's potatoes, sugar beets, canola, pulses, and so much more, Mr. Speaker.

We have already seen a number of investments roll into this province, even just over this last year. We set an investment attraction target of \$1.4 billion. Of that \$1.4 billion, we've already

seen \$527 million of new value-added investment into agriculture, something where my department has been working with over a hundred different companies, a hundred different leads, to try to attract value-added investment into the province. With that \$1.4 billion investment attraction goal we've actually set a jobs target of 2,000 net new jobs, and we've actually almost got half of that, Mr. Speaker, at 981 jobs, coupled with that \$527 million investment into value-added processing in the agriculture space. Obviously, these jobs: it's a wide variety of value-added processing, everything from canola processing, plant protein, grain processing, ag tech, emerging sectors like hemp and biocomposites.

But there is a reason that job creators are picking Alberta as a place to invest. We have one of the lowest corporate tax rates in North America. We've made it our mission to get out of the way of job creators by cutting red tape by a third. You might say that other jurisdictions are taking a similar approach, but I believe that our province has something that other places around the world don't, and that's our farmers, ranchers, and producers here in the province. They are world leaders that produce high-quality, safe food products. Again, it's because of our history as well as our clean air, our clean land, and our clean water, something that we can actually sell and that we do sell as we export around the world as an Alberta brand.

But this is our message to all the job creators out there that are looking for a place to invest: we want them to invest here in Alberta. That leads me to one of the proposed changes in Bill 54. Right now it is not clear what actually constitutes a commercial activity under the act. It is intended to mean anything outside a district's purpose. This means that if a district wants to engage in a commercial activity, say hydroelectric generation, that would require an investment above its annual charges to irrigators, and that would mean that you must conduct a plebiscite. By clarifying that the irrigation expansion and modernization investment, that \$185 million investment and future investments, is not a commercial activity, these amendments in Bill 54 would allow the industry to borrow funds for large-scale projects, again, like the \$815 million historic investment that I mentioned earlier.

These amendments clarify what irrigation districts already knew to be true, which is that the enhancement of irrigation works and projects are acceptable. But this clarification reinforces that understanding, and it also sets our irrigation districts up for future expansion projects. Now, expanding irrigated acres is just one way that our government is making sure that our farmers and ranchers continue to drive our province's economy.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we have also taken steps to modernize specific parts in the act in regard to irrigation districts' governance. This amendment gives irrigation districts the option to develop term limits for their boards. Each irrigation district can decide for themselves if they would like to implement term limits. The ability to set term limits would ensure that irrigation districts are enabled to set term limits if they pass a bylaw requesting them to do so.

Irrigation is, obviously, a vital part of Alberta's economy and will be well into our future as it boosts our economic recovery. Alberta's government is investing in our agriculture industry to grow the sector, to expand primary agriculture production, and to support a diversified, value-added processing industry. Now, these amendments would provide assurance for irrigation districts, getting shovels into the ground sooner and creating jobs for Albertans at a time when they need it most, and they will allow the districts to do more with what they already have, using water more efficiently within their water allocations.

There's no doubt, Mr. Speaker, that Alberta's farmers are stewards of the land. They are the true environmentalists. They make their living off the environment, unlike a lot of left-wing environmentalists

that just make a lot of money off rhetoric. That is why I am so proud to bring this piece of legislation forward to empower the industry that keeps Alberta moving forward and, obviously, the best place to invest in the world when it comes to agriculture.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move to adjourn debate. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 58 Freedom to Care Act

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women has risen.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. It is absolutely my honour to rise today to move second reading of Bill 58, the Freedom to Care Act.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation demonstrates our government's commitment to supporting the nonprofit and voluntary sector. The proposed Freedom to Care Act will support the key role of nonprofit and charitable organizations to provide social good to Albertans. The legislation will also further demonstrate the government's commitment to support and encourage volunteering in our province. As Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women I am so honoured to see first-hand the amazing work of Alberta's nonprofit organizations.

In times of crisis and emergency local nonprofit organizations and their volunteers are well positioned to respond to the needs of the community members facing hardship, and this was especially evident throughout the last year. Including providing core necessities such as food and shelter, Alberta's nonprofit organizations and the great volunteers who offer their time to them are highly effective at responding to community needs because they can be agile and have extremely strong community relationships.

3:00

Like commercial organizations, legislation and regulation govern the activities of nonprofit and charitable organizations. Nonprofits, however, are unique in nature compared to the for-profit organizations. As a result, government regulations intended for businesses are not always the best suited to regulate nonprofit organizations. Additionally, regulations meant primarily for commercial purposes often have existing exemption mechanisms for nonprofit and charitable groups to access. Currently there are 20 pieces of Alberta legislation that have exemptions specific to charitable and nonprofit groups and many, many more that provide exemptions quite a bit more broadly.

One of the examples that I've used in the past – it happens quite often – is that folks don't know that they have the exemption. In my riding of Chestermere-Strathmore Pastor Karp has the harvest healing centre, which is an overnight shelter that also has AA meetings and provides a kitchen as well to provide meals to folks who may need that. When she was building her building and she had gotten all of the dollars from the community and buy-in from the community to open this beautiful place, what ended up happening is that her HVAC was not up to where it needed to be.

What she could have done is gone to the municipal government there in Strathmore and received a variance in order to help her to be able to at least move forward with some of the work that was going on in that building while they were getting the HVAC done. Unfortunately, she didn't know that that exemption existed, and neither did the municipality. If they had applied for that exemption, most likely she would have been able to receive it, especially given

the incredible amount of good she does there. A process of finding out about that is what triggered a large part of how we've come to the understanding of what needs to happen. Like I've said in the past, many exemptions exist, but it's like anything. If you don't know the exemption is there and you don't know how to access it, it's very difficult to actually get that work done.

For example, the public health care act contains regulation exemptions, mechanisms for nonprofit organizations with regard to food donations. However, there is no central inventory or navigational tool available to nonprofit, charitable organizations to learn about and access these existing exemptions. As well, there is no mechanism to grant one-time reasonable exemptions to nonprofits if needed to support them in providing programs and services to the benefit of the community. This can prevent them from effectively responding to emergencies and supporting Albertans in their time of need.

There was another situation in one of our member's ridings where, during the cold snap when it was around minus 45, they were inviting homeless folks into the church to try and help them out, but with respect to what they were allowed to do, there was no exemption to actually allow those folks to stay overnight, so in essence they would have had to kick these folks out in the middle of the night in this freezing, freezing cold night. They had to creatively come up with an idea of how to create a cafe so that these folks could stay within the church's warm arms, warm embrace for the night and stay there, but they had to also have two people be awake all night to watch over the folks that were in there because their sprinkler system was not up to par. These are the kinds of things that you can imagine in pretty much any community, where we have a situation like this where it's imperative that we make sure that these organizations are able to move forward and help out and do this social good.

Mr. Speaker, if we have the privilege of passing the Freedom to Care Act, it would allow cabinet, through an order in council, to grant nonprofits one-time short-term exemptions to some of the government regulations. The cabinet would take into account, obviously, advice from the public service when considering an exemption to ensure it protects – obviously, we need to make sure that we're protecting the health and well-being of all Albertans. The act would also require me as the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women to report annually on exemption requests that cannot be addressed through existing processes or legislation. We've had a lot of questions around exemptions that this would apply to. One of the great things about this is that we'll actually have data to be able to show exemptions that exist, ones that have not existed and also to be able to move a little bit faster in the times of crisis to be able to help out our communities.

To support the implementation of the Freedom to Care Act, we would like to be able to create a central website that would be created to list all of the regulatory exemptions that exist now. Then the website would also be able to help the nonprofits identify and access existing exemptions, which are actually automatic in some cases, but because they don't know about them, it's hard to access them.

Then it will also include a form for nonprofits and charitable organizations who are in need of assistance with accessing the exemptions or requesting a new one. When the need for a new one-time common-sense exemption is identified, Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women will be able to direct that request to the appropriate ministry to lead the development of a recommendation for an order in council.

Another really important element of the Freedom to Care Act is the new volunteer liability protections. Nonprofits rely heavily on volunteers to provide services to Albertans, and we saw this, you know, at the beginning of the COVID crisis. A lot of our volunteers in this province are senior citizens, who suddenly became a very, very

vulnerable group under COVID, especially when we didn't know as much as we do now about that. Rebuilding that volunteer base and making sure that folks are coming out to volunteer and making sure that they have access to everything they need in order to be able to volunteer is very important. When we were talking about this with the nonprofits, they can't function without volunteers. They certainly wouldn't be able to deliver their services the way they do now, and nearly half, actually, of all nonprofit organizations do not have staff. They rely solely on the amazing volunteers in our province, of which we have about 1.6 million. It's really astonishing.

This legislation would ensure that an individual volunteer who performs services for a nonprofit organization or the Crown cannot be held personally liable for damages or harm. This would apply as long as harm is not caused by wilful or criminal misconduct or if the volunteer happens to be operating a vehicle. The volunteer must also be acting within the scope of his or her responsibilities and must be properly licensed, certified, or authorized. The liability protection does not cover volunteers who are unlawfully impaired by alcohol or drugs when the damage occurs.

Alberta's nonprofits have helped us to make it through some of the most difficult times in our history. I'm sure all of us in this House never expected that we would be standing here working through COVID, certainly not being able to see your faces under a mask. It's been an exceptionally difficult time for all of us, and we're so grateful for all of the volunteers and everyone who has helped us through this.

The nonprofits have helped through floods and fires and the COVID-19 pandemic, and they've really, really been here for all of us. The Freedom to Care Act would hopefully allow them to be able to focus on helping people because navigating these exemptions is just a whole lot of work, so if we're able to be able to centralize this and make it easier so that these wonderful folks are able to do the things that they do to help build their communities, that would just be wonderful.

Mr. Speaker, I'm asking all the members of this House for their support of Bill 58, the Freedom to Care Act, and I would ask all members if we could adjourn debate, please. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 59

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2021

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance is rising.

Mr. Toews: All right. Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move third reading of Bill 59, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2021. The funding requested through this bill will help protect the health and jobs of Albertans by allowing the government to fulfill commitments in Alberta's recovery plan. The money will be directed to health care, the critical worker benefit, and initiatives such as the small and medium enterprise relaunch grant, which will not only help Albertans and their businesses survive the pandemic but support jobs as well.

Mr. Speaker, the cost of the pandemic is high. The global health crisis and preceding economic recession has hit Alberta's resource-based economy particularly hard. Albertans are counting on our government to fight the pandemic and mitigate its effects.

3:10

In 2020-2021 revenue has declined by \$7.7 billion from budget while expenses are up by \$5.2 billion. Expenses are up due to our robust COVID-19 response and our economic recovery measures that have supported Albertans as they've weathered this crisis. While the extra expense in this bill is needed to support Albertans during these challenging times, Alberta's government has not lost focus on the long-term fiscal prudence and responsibility priority, a commitment this government made to Albertans. We remain committed to our three fiscal anchors: keeping Alberta's net debt-to-GDP ratio below 30 per cent, bringing our spending in line with that of other provinces on a per capita basis, and developing a plan for balancing the budget once the pandemic is beaten.

I ask again that the hon. members support this bill to ensure the province can continue to fight the pandemic and mitigate its effects.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

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

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to be able to rise and speak to this bill on supplementary supply and address some of the issues that, of course, are plaguing us as a province at this really difficult time. Without a doubt it is, you know, the average Albertans that are out there that are feeling the crunch right now because of the decisions that have been made by this particular Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, this cabinet as well as the Premier.

First of all, I'd like to address the whole relaunch grant for businesses. Back in March small businesses in Edmonton-Ellerslie and across the province were reaching out to me and to my colleagues on this side of the House, and we were coming into this House since the beginning of the pandemic asking this government to do something to help small businesses here in the province of Alberta, and this cabinet waited and waited and waited and waited, which I find so incredibly ironic, Mr. Speaker. They're so quick to associate this side of the House with Justin Trudeau, yet this government, when it came to helping small businesses here in the province of Alberta, basically just waited for the federal government to come through on perhaps what was one of the most important things that small businesses were coming to us with at that time.

I know that if they were coming to me as the MLA for Edmonton-Ellerslie and to my colleagues on this side of the House, then they were probably most likely also going to the members on the other side of this House as well, Mr. Speaker, complaining about what? Saying that because of the pandemic it was absolutely essential to provide them with a rent subsidy, yet nothing was done by this government. I believe it was nine months that small businesses here in the province of Alberta had to wait for this government to actually step up and actually do something, and then when they finally did, they provided this \$5,000 relaunch grant.

We had to keep pressuring them again. This is not enough. Small-business owners here in the province of Alberta are saying that this is not enough. Yes, then with pressure from this side of the House as well as pressure from small-business owners all across the province, they decided to lift the relaunch grant a little bit more. They reduced the percentage of revenue lost. At first they started off with 50 per cent, then it went to 40 per cent, and then it went to 30 per cent of revenue lost. Their track record speaks for itself when it actually comes to supporting small business here in the province of Alberta.

Now, I'm in agreement that we need to do this, and that's why I'm going to vote for this supplementary supply. I will vote for the

supplementary supply as well as the majority of my colleagues on this side of the House will do the same. But the track record of this government needs to be mentioned within this House, that they could have done more. And when they could've been doing more to help small businesses here in the province of Alberta, they left it up to Trudeau and this federal government to actually step in and help the small-business owners of Alberta. They failed to take responsibility for actually helping small business here in the province of Alberta for the first nine, 10 months of the pandemic, even when we were urging, demanding, calling on them, coming into this House day after day after day to ask them to do something to help the small businesses of Alberta.

I find this absolutely rich. When they go out to the public with their stale talking points, they like to present themselves as the saviours of small business here in the province of Alberta, that they're the ones that are the best when it comes to the economy, when what we have seen is a failed track record not only when it comes to the issue of supporting small businesses but on the whole issue of the critical worker benefit as well, on health care, the fact that they're getting rid of 11,000 workers from the health care sector here in the province of Alberta.

I just finished tabling today 191 e-mails from constituents of mine that are also in the health care sector, nurses and more; 191 e-mails that I received to my office. And if I'm receiving 191 e-mails, I can only assume that members on that side of the House are also receiving at least a substantial number from health care workers all across this province asking them to please stop what they're doing, especially in the middle of a pandemic.

This government needs to answer for the decisions that they are making and how they are impacting the lives of Albertans. I'll remind everybody in this House again, as I tend to do, that we're here to serve the people of Alberta. I get it; these members on the other side of the House, although they accuse us of being ideological, are following their own ideological principles and their approach to the economy when it comes to what they believe is actually going to be best for the province of Alberta. But what we see in jurisdiction after jurisdiction across this great land is that the approach they use, what they claim to actually be helping the economy of Alberta, is actually wreaking havoc. They've done that through decision after decision when it comes to a number of issues, and they're doing this right in the middle of a pandemic, when Albertans need us most.

The Minister of Finance and the President of Treasury Board rises in this House and claims that he's doing the best with the budget and that in requesting this supplementary supply, he's doing it for the people of Alberta. I would ask the members on the other side of this House to really consider what it is that they're doing when it comes to supporting Albertans through this pandemic. It's sad. It's really sad.

I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, there was a great coffee shop in Edmonton-Ellerslie, a great, great coffee shop. It was called the Good Earth cafe. I used to go there almost on a daily basis to get a good cup of joe. I'd often, without even planning it, run into constituents there. It was a great coffee shop. Because of the economic crisis that we're going through and because small businesses didn't get the supports that they actually needed when they needed it most, like many other small businesses, Good Earth was forced to close.

3:20

I'm talking about mom-and-pop – mom-and-pop – small businesses throughout Alberta having been forced to close because of the reality of the economic crisis that we're going through. This government came too late to provide this relaunch grant to a lot of small businesses here in the province of Alberta. Then when they

even provided the relaunch grant, the stipulations that they put on actually being able to apply for the relaunch grant didn't allow for businesses that hadn't been in business for more than a year to actually apply for the grant.

I'll remind members of this House that these small-business owners – it's not as if the pandemic started and they decided: okay; I'm going to get into business now. As, I'm sure, many members on the other side of the House have run businesses, they realize that they need to apply for licences. If they're going to have a shop in a local retail space in a strip mall, they have to prepare it. They have to go through renovations. They have to get the space ready. All these things these people were doing before their business actually launched and started functioning and providing service and products to the people within the constituency and to the people who live in the area.

I don't need to remind you, Mr. Speaker, because I'm sure that you know, that small business here in the province of Alberta employs 60 to 65 per cent of Albertans. When the small businesses were coming to me and requesting me to do something about it and I was coming to this government and demanding day after day after day after day to ask them to do something to support small business here in the province of Alberta, I wasn't doing it just for the small businesses. I was also doing it for all of those people that they employ, as many of my colleagues were doing as well throughout that whole period, where this government sat on their hands for nine to 10 months before they actually put a grant in place to actually help small businesses here in the province of Alberta.

Then they also came late to the game when it came to the critical worker benefit. Not only did they fail small businesses; now they're also failing front-line workers here in the province of Alberta. I'm not even going to get into the fact that so many people were left out of what was considered a core, essential worker here in the province of Alberta. People came knocking on my door for that as well. I got lots of e-mails on that as well. You know, I don't have the statistics and numbers, but just from the e-mails that were coming into my office, I could tell you that the majority of the workers that were left out of the critical worker benefit tended to be women and tended to be people who were ethnically diverse here in the province of Alberta. What does that say, systematically, about what this government's priorities are?

Now, these are the questions that I wish members on the other side would actually get up in this House and speak to because those are real concerns of real Albertans, ones that are suffering through this pandemic. They need our help, yet members on the other side are silent and they're not addressing – like, I get it. Every government needs to make decisions, but I can tell you that what I'm criticizing right now, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that they came late to the game. They came late to the game when it came to supporting small businesses. They came late to the game when it came to supporting front-line workers here in the province. It's, like, one thing after another. I wish they would just get up and explain why. What took them so long? This is money being offered from the federal government, and I don't want to even get into how things were rolled out.

It's sad when people in my community are coming up to me and saying, you know: "How come the UCP government made it so that the employer had to actually apply for the critical worker benefit? My employer isn't applying for it, but I'm a front-line worker, too. I deserve to have this. I've been suffering through this. My family has been suffering through the pandemic. We need the support."

In my personal opinion, Mr. Speaker, that was one of the worst decisions they could have made. You know, if this government had been paying attention to issues surrounding the Alberta immigrant nominee program, they would know that it's an issue. When the employer has the power over the worker, when it actually comes to

applying for certain things, what tends to happen is that workers' voices are left out.

Now, I'm not here to ask this government to make Alberta into some kind of workers' paradise, like they like to claim. They like to get up in this House and accuse me of being so incredibly radical. I'm just asking this government that everybody have a voice. If corporations have a voice, if medium-sized businesses have a voice, if small businesses have a voice, if all these different stakeholders have a voice, then why can't workers also have a voice inside this House? We're all Albertans, and we all deserve to have our voices heard.

As I was saying, Mr. Speaker, this is one of the worst decisions they could have made when it came to this critical worker benefit program, putting the responsibility on a corporation to then have to be able to apply for the critical worker benefit on behalf of the workers themselves. Why couldn't the workers have a voice themselves and been able to apply directly to the program?

These are the things that continue to plague me. I'll remind you, Mr. Speaker, again that these are actual people, e-mails that are coming into my office, people that are actually contacting me. Sometimes even when I go to my early morning prayer in the morning, people who are going to the masjid with me are coming up to me and saying: Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, this is the issue that I'm having. They bring it up to me when they see me out in public. They write e-mails. They phone my office. These are real people who have real issues with the decisions that this government is making. I wish that they would – and I'm trying to be as diplomatic as I possibly can here. The problem is that when people don't feel heard, that is when anxiety, exasperation, hopelessness, fear set into the human psyche.

We all know that Albertans are going through a very difficult, difficult time right now. There are a lot of issues when it comes to mental health. Members on the other side of the House are also talking about it. I'll be honest, I'm hearing a lot about it, too, in the community, people contacting me as well. But I can tell you that these matters are made worse when people feel that they're not being listened to.

3:30

Just listening to our constituents goes a long way. That was one of the first things that I learned when I got elected, back in 2015. I would invite people: "Okay, you have an issue, come and talk to me. Come and talk to me. Come to my office. Let's chat about these things." People that had problems with AISH. People who had problems with income support. "Just come to my office; let's talk about it." I would try to do my best to help out these people.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for . . .

Ms Hoffman: I thought it was 29(2)(a). Sorry.

The Acting Speaker: There is no 29(2)(a) on the second speaker.

Are there any members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore has risen.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to be speaking on Bill 59, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2021, today. This is a bill which, given the times we are in due to COVID-19, this horrible pandemic we've been going through, is incredibly important right now. It follows closely with our Budget 2021 creation, which will give funding to a variety of sectors. The budget aims to get our economy back on track and help Albertans through these incredibly difficult times.

Bill 59 is needed to help this government achieve its two main priorities, which are saving lives by responding to COVID-19 as well as taking action to save peoples' livelihoods. As we know, Mr. Speaker, the pandemic and economic recession has hit Alberta's resource-based economy extremely hard. Albertans are counting on this government to not only fight the pandemic but mitigate the many impacts that we've endured from the falling oil prices, initially the battle between Saudi Arabia and Russia, and a recession that has been ongoing for many years.

With supplementary supply we can do many great things for Albertans today and into the future. The global health crisis, economic recession, and last year's oil prices, as I've said, have had a major effect on our government's fiscal situation as well. In 2020-21 revenue declined by \$7.7 billion from budget, while expenses were up by \$5.2 billion, mainly due to the COVID-19 response and economic recovery measures that were designed to help Albertans weather this current crisis.

Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to keeping Alberta's net debt-to-GDP ratio below 30 per cent, which will bring our spending in line with other provinces, while also developing a plan for balancing the budget once the pandemic is behind us. This bill requests a total of \$1.3 billion in expense along with \$750 million in capital investment, which will mainly be used for the COVID-19 response and Alberta's recovery plan.

Mr. Speaker, there is no denying that this pandemic has had a major impact on our economy, being the greatest economic recession that we have seen since the Great Depression. However, I will say that the province has made some small gains over these last few months, and as a result, the projected year-end deficit has actually decreased. When we came into office, we made a promise to Albertans to balance the budget during our first term, and we had set out a plan for this in our first budget. It was beginning to work; it actually was. Alberta was on a path to economic recovery until we were hit with both, as I mentioned, the COVID-19 pandemic and the global oil price crash.

Mr. Speaker, due to these unprecedented times our goal of balancing the budget is being adjusted. However, we remain committed to maintaining fiscal discipline and balancing the budget once we have a better sense of what the future holds regarding COVID-19, as many things still remain unclear. Despite these tough times our provincial deficit remains relatively low compared to most other provinces throughout Canada. We were and continue to be fortunate that borrowing in 2020-21 has been at extremely low-interest rates. We cannot be guaranteed that it will stay that way, but at least for now that has been a blessing.

Mr. Speaker, we need to do what we can to boost the many sectors that have been impacted as a result of COVID-19, and the supplementary supply act is a huge part of this. This act will provide the funding that goes towards Health, Children's Services, Education, and Labour and Immigration. With these investments into capital projects Albertans will be provided with many more job opportunities in the near future. We know how many have lost their jobs over the last year, but slowly employment opportunities are beginning to pick back up. With the added supplementary funding for these capital projects, as I mentioned, this government will be able to continue creating employment opportunities for Albertans.

On top of this, the supplementary estimates also include significant funds going towards child care grants. This funding comes from a 2019-2020 federal bilateral agreement payment and is going to be redistributed to child care providers who can utilize these funds in the current year. While child care is just one of the many areas receiving funding in this act, I believe it is one that will resonate with all Albertans as it is extremely important. The act will help to lighten the load for many Alberta parents.

I'm incredibly honoured to have had the opportunity to speak to support this act. I believe it will be incredibly beneficial for all Albertans as we continue to weather the storm that COVID-19 has presented for us as well as the recession and the oil price crash.

With that, I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available should anybody wish to make a quick question or comment.

Seeing none, are there any members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has risen.

Member Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I won't speak long. Of course, supplementary supply is here, and when we were in government we did that on occasion as well to address the needs of Albertans. While the previous speaker, from Calgary-Glenmore, identified this as a supplementary supply to get the economy back on track, nothing could be further from the truth.

The government is essentially throwing Albertans' money away. For years they have put bad debts down on reducing corporate taxes. That has not paid off, Mr. Speaker. They have lost \$4.7 billion and counting with regard to the fiscal plan we're in. Over the course of their four years they have calculated that at \$4.7 billion. That money would've been tremendously helpful to this province. They've also thrown money away with regard to KXL; \$1.3 billion, I think, is the latest estimate. When I look down the list that is scheduled here of the seven ministries and total them up, lo and behold, had they not wasted \$1.3 billion, perhaps more, on a bet for Donald Trump to stay in the White House, we would have had that \$1.3 billion and no need for a supplementary supply. It totals up to \$1.3 billion. Albertans need help now, and what they get from this government is investments in things that haven't paid off for this province.

You know, this government likes to point to projections and forecasts from banks and the Conference Board and places like that. Those are just projections, Mr. Speaker. That does not mean money is in the bank. That does not mean it's a sure thing. Just as the previous speaker said, you know, the economy has been side-swiped. Well, that could very much happen with these projections and forecasts. That is not something you can bet on, and it's not a path to economic recovery.

What is a path to economic recovery, Mr. Speaker, is investing in Albertans. My colleague from Edmonton-Ellerslie talked about how small and medium-sized businesses are drivers of the economy, and they've been missing out and bereft from the investments that the government has so far put towards them. We have seen a jobs plan that has not returned jobs to this province in significant numbers. We have seen Albertans asking for assistance so that they can get through this pandemic, this third wave that was predictable and which we should not be entering, but we are as a result, again, of the inactions of the government.

3:40

There is an expense here in Health, an area that's tremendously important, that we need to see significant investments in. But what we got from this government was a prolonged fight with the very front-line health heroes that we depend on to keep us well.

Mr. Speaker, I and my colleagues here think that the actions of this government have hurt this province. Ultimately, we are a lesser province as a result of the government and their actions. The supplementary supply is needed because in part there are federal monies that are coming that benefit all of us, but, again, you'll hear the government talk about how the federal government is not a partner, not a support, not anything to help us through, but Albertans know different. Albertans know that there have been

significant federal dollars in significant supports for workers who have been unfortunately affected by the downturn of our economy or the shutdown of parts of our economy as a result of this.

Mr. Speaker, I don't want to belabour my portion of saying that Bill 59, I think, could have been paid off by not investing in a bad bet like KXL. We know that we need a boost in this province; it's true. We need to protect each other through this pandemic. We need to see vaccines roll out so that we can get back to a stage where we open up the economy in greater ways that are safe for all of us.

We'll continue on this side to point out the shortcomings of the government with regard to the actions that they take on behalf of all Albertans, and we'll try and prove those as we go forward, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available should anyone wish to have any questions or comments.

Seeing none, are there any members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods has risen.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to get the opportunity to speak briefly to Bill 59, which is the supplementary supply bill. The supplementary supply bill that has been brought forward by this government accounts for additional monies that are needed to get our province through to March 31. To be clear, March 31 at this point is now five business days away, or seven calendar days, so just at the tail end of the calendar year, going back through the books figuring out how much additional spending.

Bill 59 contains within it a lot of money specifically because of the pandemic and pandemic-related funding. Some really important funding and programs have been listed here as part of Bill 59 and a lot of ideas, a lot of programs that in theory should be good news and that in theory I would have been very, very happy to support. Unfortunately, the way this government has rolled some of these out is incredibly problematic. My colleagues have spoken to some of the concerns already in their initial debate: issues with the small and medium enterprise grant and how long it took before that grant was released as well as the fact that during the estimates process the \$137 million that had not yet gone out the door, incredibly concerning when we know it is businesses that are closing now.

Very similarly, though – and I want to spend most of my time speaking about the Labour and Immigration portion of the supplementary supply estimates – we see here additional funds coming from the federal government to support two incredibly important programs. The first is the critical worker benefit program, and the second is the Alberta jobs now program, which colleagues of mine have coined the Alberta jobs maybe later program because although we are voting on supplementary supply and allocating money, this is a program that has not been announced. This is a program that Albertans desperately need because of what we've seen here in Alberta during the pandemic, which is an incredible loss of jobs. Certainly, I believe, Alberta is one of the jurisdictions in Canada with the biggest economic and job losses over the past year. We have the second-highest unemployment rate. We're expected to have the slowest recovery in the country. So an Alberta jobs now program should be good news. We should be able to celebrate this.

Unfortunately, it is as yet unannounced, and I'm particularly concerned because we are voting in Bill 59 for \$62 million – \$62 million – to be spent before March 31. Now, I hate to repeat myself too much in a short speech, Mr. Speaker, but I will remind you that I just said: this program has not been announced. Alberta jobs now is supposed to get \$62 million out the door for March 31. The

minister hasn't announced it. We don't know who it's intended for, we don't know how many jobs it will create, we don't know how it will be delivered, and we certainly know that the government cannot get \$62 million out the door and creating jobs in five business days, a program they haven't announced. I certainly hope that the government is working on designing it, but we haven't seen that yet either.

To be very clear, this money is coming from the federal government: \$185 million was announced on December 18, specifically to quickly get jobs for Albertans, something we desperately need. It was designed to use existing job training programs through the labour market development agreements. Interestingly, on that day, December 18, only the federal government put out a news release about this new influx of money and the important work that it was going to do getting people back to work. So what I see is a government that has not announced a program or seemingly designed one, that doesn't appear to be doing what the federal government encouraged, which is to get this out through the programs you have on work.

We have great job training programs here in Alberta, training for work, incredibly successful. There are all sorts of contracts and agreements already made with job trainers because the ministry of labour: one of the things it does is help connect people back to the job market, particularly people who are close to reconnecting, everything from job fairs to resumé help to retraining programs. There are so many existing supports that this money could have been used to ramp up and get out the door quickly. Instead, we see \$62 million intended to be spent before March 31, which is five business days from now, on a program that hasn't been announced.

I will also note that the federal government, in the original program design, wanted 80 per cent of the money to be spent in this fiscal year, again, in the next five business days. In their budget and in their supplementary supply documents this government has made clear that the federal government has not agreed to reprofiling more than 60 per cent, which is what we see, into the next fiscal. Instead of \$62 million, we're actually supposed to be spending more than \$100 million in this fiscal. The federal government hasn't given Alberta permission, yet we're voting on this supplementary supply and on this budget.

Albertans need jobs. Instead, there have been delays, and this isn't the only program where we've seen this. The critical worker benefit program: \$347 million from the federal government, announced last May, to help our front-line workers, our essential workers, to say thank you to them, and this government left that money on the table for over 280 days. Let me tell you that when I asked about this program repeatedly through the House, I honestly got the impression that they weren't even going to use it. The Minister of Finance would stand up and talk about respect for taxpayers as if putting in 25 per cent was too much to ask Albertans, as if they wouldn't spend one to get four. Now they have. I'm pleased to do that.

But I also note that during the estimates process we found out that in order to get the critical worker benefit money out the door – the majority of it has to be out the door this year; you'll note that it's included in Bill 59 – this government had to design a program and get it out the door. Now we find out that they've hired over 100 contractors working from home, supplied them all with some government laptops. They snap hired 100 people in order to get this money out the door by March 31. Now, I can only imagine that that's not how a business would do it, snap hire 100 people because the deadline has come up and you've waited too long to launch your program. This is not showing respect for taxpayers.

3:50

I will also say, when we talk about respect for taxpayers, that each of these essential workers, who are doing their everything in so many jobs, that this government has chosen to ignore and not include in this program, breaks my heart. Did you know that funeral service providers are not included in the critical worker benefit? Can you imagine what those workers at our funeral homes have been going through? They were told that they are not part of the health care system, but I know that those funeral service providers were part of the solution to make sure that Albertans did not end up in refrigerated trucks when they passed. They were directly part of trying to help manage this pandemic and respond to it, and they've been excluded from this benefit.

Liquor store and cannabis retail employees were told that they were essential and they needed to stay open, but they don't qualify. I've talked to – how many? – workers who work in the same space, dealing with the same customers but don't qualify because they work in the hardware section or they work at the Canada Post office inside the Shoppers and there's a distinction between the different workers.

Or how about this one? The nurses and front-line health care professionals who work at Canadian Blood Services do not qualify, after all nurses were told that they would be part of this program and thanked. How is Canadian Blood Services not part of our health care continuum during a pandemic? This was a place that was kept open, that kept making sure that the blood and plasma we need for our hospitals were available. The workers who worked in that medical setting, drawing blood from strangers, cannot qualify for the critical worker benefit.

Not only did this program take 287 days to launch; when it did, it caused more pain, frustration, and hurt than it did a thank you. Other provinces developed situations where they had hourly top-ups instead of a \$1,200 cheque, hourly top-ups that allowed them to include part-time workers, that allowed them to include people who worked less than 300 hours. I got an e-mail from somebody who had worked 299.25 hours for a single employer and 100 hours for another employer, 15 minutes short, somebody who was working on that front line, helping our health care system, and doesn't qualify because of these arbitrary rules.

The supplementary supply should have included spending to support Alberta's workers with programming that we can be proud of. Instead, we have the critical worker benefit program, that has made people angry and feel attacked. We have the Alberta jobs now program, that isn't even announced. I hope that when the minister announces this program, it is a great program and that it will work to get Albertans back to work, but from what I've seen out of this minister and this government, I am skeptical. Getting \$347 million from the federal government for the critical worker benefit, getting \$185 million from the federal government for Alberta jobs now: these should be good-news stories. Instead, we're seeing concern, we're seeing confusion, and we're seeing certainly a lot of Albertans who feel very, very concerned about this.

As I look at Bill 59, when I look at what our province has gone through over the last year, I want to take a moment to say thank you to all of the essential workers, who were critical and who did work through this pandemic. I want to say thank you to everyone, whether you were driving Uber, you were a health care worker, you were a teacher working in an underresourced school during a pandemic, whether you worked at university campuses cleaning things, whether you worked in the hospitals doing laundry. So many people were part of us getting through this pandemic, and we're not through yet. We're

still working on that. But each of those workers deserved a thank you, and they didn't deserve a hastily planned program that was delayed by over 280 days, that seemed to have arbitrary cut-offs, that has caused so much hurt and confusion.

I didn't even mention, on the critical worker benefit side, disability workers. There are some bizarre exclusions where workers doing the same work – depending on how their work is coded, some are included and some are not. And child care workers: the list goes on and on.

I want to thank my colleagues because they have been fielding these concerns from workers in their various critic portfolios. Our offices are hearing from a lot of them, and I can only imagine that the government MLAs' offices are getting a lot of calls about this program and their concerns over the program design.

When it comes to Alberta jobs now, I would encourage this government to make sure that the \$185 million that the federal government has given to this province, is sending to this province – use it. Get it out to the hands of employers, workers. Let's get creating jobs because the longer we sit on it, the bigger the financial cost. In fact, we saw with the critical worker benefit that economists agreed with some reasonable financial analysis that we did about what it cost our economy when they waited so long to use that money. It impacted our GDP. It impacted our number of jobs. When people have money to spend, it helps the economy, and getting that critical worker benefit money out the door should have been a priority for this government.

It was intended for the first wave, and then it got used for the second wave, and it got limited to people who had only worked over 300 hours rather than including people who worked multiple jobs, which I think shows perhaps a disconnect between the people on the front lines, who have been keeping our province running, and who this government is intent on supporting, because people working multiple part-time jobs absolutely happens.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I certainly have shared a number of my concerns with Bill 59, the supplementary supply bill. These additional monies are important. I wish that the government would do a better job of responding to the needs of Albertans in getting these federal funds out the door.

With that, I will conclude my comments.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available should anybody have any questions or comments. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has risen.

Ms Hoffman: Yeah. Just very briefly I want to thank the member for her remarks and say that this reminded me of a conversation I had recently with a constituent who highlighted for me that even within their own workplace, somewhere that I frequent – I buy groceries regularly at Superstore – there were employees that qualified and employees who didn't qualify working on the same floor, working the same shifts side by side, based on how many years of seniority they had and therefore where they were at on the grid. People working side by side in a grocery store, keeping folks safe, primarily women who started working there in the 1980s, weren't qualified for the worker benefit, but younger folks were able to qualify. I just wanted to say that I know that the member highlighted a number of very clear examples, but that one was one in particular that stood out to me.

As with the remarks of the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, we see equity-seeking groups regularly in these positions that are being overlooked. We've highlighted cab drivers. We've highlighted some of these retail workers or people working essential positions on the front lines. Yeah. I wanted to thank the member for talking

about the people who are directly impacted by this decision, and if she had any further remarks about those folks, I'm certainly happy to hear them. She's definitely led us down a thoughtful opportunity to explore this.

Lastly, I wanted to say that the contrast to this is how quickly the governing party worked to move to get money from the federal government, from Canadian taxpayers, to pay their staff at the beginning of this, how quickly they moved to make sure that they were taking money from Canadians to pay partisan political staff, but they won't – here we are, almost a year after they've done that – act to bring about some equity to ensure that folks who are working to keep us all safe during this very difficult time are given the same opportunities to be recognized for their efforts.

Thank you for giving me an opportunity to share those reflections.

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

With two minutes and 50 seconds remaining, are there any takers?

Seeing none, are there any hon. members looking to join debate on this matter?

Seeing none, I am prepared to ask the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 59 read a third time]

4:00 **Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

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

Bill 60 Appropriation Act, 2021

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments or questions or amendments to be offered at this time? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure to rise in Committee of the Whole on Bill 60, the Appropriation Act, 2021, which is really, of course, to discuss Budget 2021, which was presented by the government a few weeks ago. If I could sum up in one word what I think Albertans were expecting from Budget 2021, it would be jobs. That is the expectation that Albertans held. That is the expectation that the Official Opposition held. That is not the expectation, however, that the government met.

We don't need to go through it. We've all discussed, of course, the incredibly stressful economic period that we are currently facing in our province with respect to the pandemic and the economic recession, but I have to say, Mr. Chair, that having listened to some of the comments from members on the government side just prior to this debate, when we were discussing Bill 59, the supplementary supply act bill, you know, some of those comments seemed to really clearly indicate why we see such a problem with the current budget that was tabled by this government. The challenge is that the government is still telling a story about their economic record that is not based in fact.

I heard members just a mere few minutes ago on the government side talk about how Alberta's economy was doing so well up until the pandemic and up until the economic recession, that began around March 2020, the drop in oil prices. That, Mr. Chair, is absolutely inaccurate. It is a hundred per cent refuted by the facts, the facts being that even before the pandemic and the drop in oil

prices in early 2020, what we saw from this government from their first year on record was 50,000 jobs lost already. We saw the GDP shrinking. We saw a deficit doubled, and this was prepandemic. We saw the economic growth that had begun under the former government, and that was actually on the rise, stall, and that was all before the pandemic.

I understand now why we see such an uninspired budget that does not reflect the needs of Albertans, because I believe the government is telling themselves a story that isn't true. They're trying to tell that story and convince Albertans of that as well, but the facts are pretty clear that even before the pandemic hit, this government was failing on the economy, one of the things that they claimed that they were going to be the best at, right? Jobs, the economy, and pipelines: all three failures even before the pandemic hit, and then the pandemic hit.

Now, it's been a difficult time. I think it's been very clear – and we've said it a number of times on this side – that, of course, no government could have anticipated what was going to happen and that it was going to be a difficult time. A significant amount of the economic stalling, the loss that we have seen over this past year: obviously, it's been happening in jurisdictions across the globe. It's certainly not unique to Alberta. But what is important is how each jurisdiction is responding to those challenges. What we've seen – we've just discussed the supplementary supply bill, which was, really, an effort by this government to scramble to get millions of dollars, that they had known about or that was available to them, out the door as fast as possible without planning, without strategy, without economic outcomes expected. That seems to be now this government's record on how it deals with the economy.

We saw them put in and then accelerate a corporate tax cut which, to date, has still not demonstrated one single job. Of course, even within this budget we do not see any indication that they have a clear expectation about how many jobs this corporate tax cut is going to create, because at this point, Mr. Chair, it's pretty clear that that is not an effective economic strategy.

So this year they've had it extremely difficult, extremely challenging. They've been scrambling at every point despite having significant periods of time to actually plan. There was a lot of forgiveness given in those early months of the pandemic, Mr. Chair. I think that's fair. Everybody was trying to get a hold of what was happening. There were shutdowns. There was a lot of chaos. We understand that. But now we are a year in, and we see them scrambling to get money out the door. Then we see a budget tabled that has no plans for the number one thing that Albertans are looking for, and that is jobs.

They're continuing to rely on a corporate tax cut which is not producing anything. They don't even have any projections within this budget as to what jobs are going to be created from it. We see, of course, that there is a capital plan. Of course, that is a very typical response and a necessary response. I believe the Leader of the Official Opposition said it so well yesterday. She said that, of course, investing in infrastructure is important but that it's low-hanging fruit. It is the most obvious thing that a government can do and should do when there is an economic contraction and we need to get people back to work.

However, first of all, we have to talk about the fact that this budget lays out a capital plan that includes what we already know is billions of dollars wasted on Keystone XL, yet they're including that as part of their capital investment plan, so right away the budget and the dollars are off. Secondly, I have to say, Mr. Chair, that when it comes to creating an economic recovery plan that responds to the realities of the economic recession we're in, this misses the mark. Yes, absolutely, capital infrastructure plans – investing in roads and bridges and getting things built – are going to get a number of

Albertans back to work. Of course. That's why we do it. However, it's missing the mark that this is a different kind of economic recession that we're facing.

I'm going to use a word that has been coined by Armine Yalnizyan, who is a national economist with the Atkinson Foundation. This is a "she-cession." I know that even saying that word probably makes members on the government side cringe a little bit because they don't want to acknowledge, first of all, that there are gendered impacts of this economic recession, and they certainly don't want to recognize that within their economic recovery plan.

Yesterday the Leader of the Official Opposition described – and I hope that the members opposite are already familiar with this, because economists have been talking about it for a very long time. The reality of the economic recession that we're seeing right now is that it is a K recession – right? – and that is the idea that there are certain people who are already pretty comfortable and doing well. There are those of us who managed through the pandemic okay. We kept our jobs – and I include all of us in this House – we still got paid, we were still able to manage our work, and we'll probably do okay. That's the upper spoke of the K, the one that's going up. Those people who probably were okay to begin with are going to keep doing okay.

But the reality of this recession is the bottom spoke of that K, and that is predominantly women. It's predominantly low-income workers. It's predominantly racialized individuals in work that has been fragile, that can't be done from home, that has to be done. It's front-line work, whether it's front-line health care work or it's work that can only be done in person such as retail work and accommodations and hospitality and all of that. Those individuals: they're going down, and they're going to keep going down.

We don't have an economic recovery plan tabled by this government as part of Budget 2021 that actually responds to the realities. When we talk about infrastructure – and I have talked about this before in this House, I will talk about it again, and I will keep talking about it even though I know the government is not listening. We talk about the importance of building infrastructure. We recognize that roads and bridges and communications infrastructure are important for people to work. If you have to go to work, you have to drive down a road, you have to cross a bridge, you have to go to a building, and you work in a building, but we also have to recognize the important other pieces of infrastructure that are necessary for Albertans to work.

That, of course, Mr. Chair, leads me to something that I will keep talking about over and over in this House, and that is child care. Child care is the infrastructure required to get working parents back to work, and it has been hit incredibly hard, not just in this country but specifically hard by this government in a year when it could not have been more clear that we need child care in order for people to work. Any working parent knows that who experienced the shutdown in the spring, and we've seen that with the shutdown of schools, and not just with the shutdown of schools. Despite what this government keeps saying, the Official Opposition was always in support of the idea of keeping schools open safely. That's the key that they would like to ignore. What they've done is that they've reopened schools without putting in a number of safety measures and lots of protocols that we recommended, which would have allowed students to be spread out and would have allowed us to lower the numbers in classrooms.

4:10

What we've seen is an ongoing cycle. Anybody who's a parent of children in school right now or who knows parents of children in school has seen it: quarantines, school shutdowns, classroom shutdowns. It's been ongoing. If you're a working parent trying to

do your work without that infrastructure of schools and child care, you've known how difficult it is. Every economist, every major financial institution, Chambers of Commerce have been talking about investing in that. Yet this government has tabled a budget that has not only not made up for the complete damage done to the child care sector over this past year – self-inflicted, by the way. Some of it was done, of course, by the pandemic, but much of it was inflicted by cuts put in place by this government: the end of the \$25-per-day child care program. All of those pieces took place. It's incredibly fragile. We've lost 3,000 early childhood educators from the workforce. Many programs are on the verge of closing down. And this government has not invested one dollar more in child care, which is another way of saying, Mr. Chair, that this government has no plans to invest in women's participation in the workforce.

Women's participation in the workforce has fallen in this province to levels not seen since 1984. Are any of us proud of that? Particularly, I look at the women in this House, who fought very hard to be where we are today, who did it so we can advocate for issues that matter to all of us, including women. To say that we have employment participation by women at the levels of 1984 – I was seven years old at that time, Mr. Chair. If I would have thought that I would go through my whole working life and work as hard as I have and that I know many of the members of this House have just to see that women coming behind me are going to be falling out of the workforce – that is a crisis that this budget should be addressing.

We laid out concrete suggestions over and over to this government about how they can increase women's workforce participation. Yes, child care is key to that but other elements as well. We've talked about women's role in economic recovery. This government is completely ignoring the fact that there are trades and that there is work that women need to get into, and a scholarship is not going to cut it. I can tell you first-hand, having talked openly about the fact that, yes, getting women involved in the trades is important, that I've received a backlash of responses about how women aren't cut out for the trades and how it's too tough work and that this is just feminist propaganda.

That goes to the point which we've talked about. If we're going to be serious about women in economic recovery, we can't just open the field up to women. We actually have to address the fact that there are discriminatory and gender-based harassment issues within those trades. We have to make those trades somewhere where women not only go and take the training to get into but that they will stay and that they will stay in good-paying jobs. That's not a priority for this government.

So there's no plan for jobs. My colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods previously spoke in the supply budget debate about the fact that there's the jobs now plan, which seems to be one of the, I guess, key cornerstones of this government's economic recovery plan. It is a program that is only five business days away from apparently losing all its funding, and it hasn't even been announced. It hasn't been announced. Albertans are desperately looking for what the plan is to get them back to work. This government is not interested in laying down the social infrastructure that's required for working parents to get back to work. They're also not interested in actually releasing the millions of dollars, \$65 million or \$62 million, at their disposal to actually get Albertans back to work.

I don't know what they've been doing this past year, Mr. Chair. Well, actually, I do know because I've been sitting in this Legislature. I've seen, instead of planning out an economic recovery plan – I mean, they had an economic recovery council, which apparently stopped doing work in June 2020. I don't know; I guess the economic recovery plan was done. Funny but not actually as reflected in this budget. But instead of doing that, we were sitting in this Legislature

hearing them bring forward pieces of legislation on the Senate and constitutional referendums, all of these things, which may be important to their platform and checking off their promise-made, promise-kept bulletin boards, but it does not respond to the need that is facing Albertans right now, which is about jobs, which is about getting Albertans back to work. All of that they're scrambling to do at the last minute, and it's very clear that this budget has no plan for it.

One of the things I cannot not talk about when we're talking about this budget, because I'm hearing about it every day from my constituents, is about the attack on postsecondary. Not only are my constituents talking about it – because I'm fortunate, I mean, to live in this beautiful city of Edmonton, where the University of Alberta is one of our hallmark postsecondary institutions, not just in this province but in this country. I'm a proud graduate myself of the University of Alberta. There are a number of postsecondary students, there are a number of innovators and professors and academics and researchers in my constituency.

The attack on postsecondary generally but – let's be clear – very specifically on the University of Alberta just reflects that this government does not understand what's needed for diversification and to get our economy back on track. They seem to just view postsecondary education as somehow a drain. Maybe it's because they mistrust higher learning, they mistrust the academic rigour and debate that takes place in an institution like the University of Alberta. They'd rather just churn out people to, I guess, work in their party or to – I don't know – become a member of their government, but they're not interested in good, fulsome debate and discussion and academic rigour as those postsecondary institutions provide.

This also shows that they don't understand what's needed to get the economy back on track, which is that we need to attract talent, and we need to keep talent. Talent is going to be key to our economic recovery. Why? Because we are shifting in this province. There is a shift, and it's not just happening in this province; it's happening globally. The things that we've relied upon so long for the wealth and prosperity in this province are shifting, and they've been shifting for some time. Under our government we tried to respond to that and to make some changes, and now this government has taken us back in time. We're once again having to explain to this government the importance of diversification, which has been a reality for this province for a long time. Now, apparently, maybe the light bulbs are starting to go on, but we've wasted two years during an incredible economic recession where government has put its head in the sand.

Diversification is going to require innovation, and it's going to require investment in new technologies. We need to attract people here and keep them here, yet this government's budget: almost 50 per cent of the cuts to postsecondary are targeted at the University of Alberta, the same university responsible for some incredible technologies, incredible advances in medicine in the last few years, which we've all heralded, but this government has heralded it in word and then cut it in action. That is undercutting our future in this province.

I also want to talk about the lessons learned over this past year. I could not believe, like many Albertans, to hear the fiscal update that came out, I believe, in November of 2020, which talked about how the public sector delivers no value to our province, especially given the year that we've just experienced. I mean, first of all, it's an outrageous statement to begin with, Mr. Chair, but then looking back over the year that we've just experienced, where we have realized first-hand that we cannot function without a strong health care system, without a strong education system, with teachers coming forward every day, when they're actually on the front lines,

we knew that our economy could not function without schools being open. Our economy cannot function without healthy people, without those front-line workers who are doing the work.

Yet this government still had the gall to talk about how there's no value that comes from public-sector workers and to also then put forward a budget that is premised on the very notion, again, of cutting our public services. That's not only inaccurate when you talk about what public services contribute to our economy – because it's very clear we cannot function without strong public services.

Also, two other pieces. One, how does it help our economy to put more Albertans either out of work, reduce their wages, reduce their hours, reduce their economic productivity, which is exactly what this government has in mind when they tabled this budget – whether they're firing front-line workers, whether they're going to, you know, contract them out to the private sector, whatever they're going to do, they're trying to actually make Albertans earn less and work less. How does that help our economic recovery?

In my riding – and I'm sure I've heard members opposite speak about this, many of the people here. We have a member in our family who works in the private sector, one who works in the public sector. Maybe they're all public sector. Maybe they're all private sector. But we cannot thrive in this province without a healthy public and private sector. They go together. It does not help our economic recovery to put more Albertans out of work. This is not a jobs plan. This is a put more Albertans out of their jobs plan. That's exactly what they're doing with this budget.

4:20

I have to speak one more time. When we're talking about economic growth and we're talking about what we're doing to attract new people to come and invest in this province, we have to talk about livability. We have to talk about what brings companies and investors here. It is knowing that there is a strong quality of life, where they're going to want their employees to raise their families, to live here, to want to put down roots here. What do families look at? When they are looking to follow a new job, they want to know that there will be child care available for them. They want to know that there's a strong public education system. They want to know that their health care system is going to be there if they need them. That's all about quality of life, and that's livability, and that's actually about economic productivity. It's about attracting investors. It's about saying: what kind of province do you want to invest in? So when this government talks about cutting public service sector workers, it puts people out of work, it lessens our ability to invest in the services that are necessary for our economy to function, as we've seen over this last year, and it makes us less attractive for companies to want to be here and to invest in this province.

Mr. Chair, when I saw this budget, I can't believe how – uninspired is not even the word. It is a huge disappointment to Albertans who are desperate right now for a real vision, for a real recovery plan. What we see is the same old same old. This government has shown that they have one trick, one trick only: reducing taxes. Corporate taxes, might I add, because personal income taxes have actually gone up. Corporate taxes: that's it. It did not work in 2019, it did not work last year, and it's not going to work this year. We need a budget and Albertans deserve a budget with a plan and with a vision. That is not what this government has given us.

I cannot in good conscience, on behalf of my constituents, vote in favour of a budget that is not going to put us on a path for strong economic recovery. Unfortunately, that is what this government has given us.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville has risen.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise today to speak in support of Budget 2021, a budget focusing on protecting lives and livelihoods. Alberta's government tabled this year's budget with a focus on public health while fixing the economic crisis that has led to reduced revenue and increased costs. The primary focus on health is because we are experiencing a health crisis with the COVID-19 pandemic. We still need to support our health care system due to the strain the pandemic has created. That is why Alberta's government is committing to \$23 billion, which is an increase of 4 per cent, or over \$900 million. Alberta's government has committed to \$1.25 billion in additional funding to continue the battle of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Alberta's budget also focuses on Alberta's economic recovery. Budget 2021 plans to spend \$3.1 billion more in 2021-2022 to support strategies in Alberta's recovery plan, a bold strategy to create jobs, build infrastructure, and diversify our economy. This is very important as we need to kick-start our economy as soon as possible. Although we are still in the midst of a pandemic, we can see a light at the end of the tunnel as long as the federal government continues their procurement of the vaccines we need. Budget 2021's three-year capital plan will support more than 50,000 direct and 40,000 indirect jobs up to 2024. Alberta's recovery plan in the budget will have \$1.5 billion directed to immediate action to support jobs and strategic investments and key economic sectors, with \$500 million dedicated to a recovery plan contingency.

I'm glad to see this responsible budget being introduced. I know it is difficult during these uncertain times to present a budget that plans on economic recovery in the future during a pandemic. But I believe that Budget 2021 strikes the right balance between saving lives and livelihoods. I hear concerns from my constituents that the health care system still needs support and that we can only move forward with the vaccine, but I also hear concerns of the potential of more businesses shutting down and job losses across the province.

[Mrs. Allard in the chair]

I know this is a difficult time for Alberta's government. Our elected goal was to balance the budget. Alberta's government is still committed to our ongoing efforts to reduce unnecessary spending by identifying goals to get Alberta's finances back on track. We will take many of the recommendations from the MacKinnon panel in 2019. The panel full of financial expertise gave our government great advice and recommendations to get our province's budget back on track. I am very proud of this ongoing commitment that we were elected to do. Alberta needs a fiscally responsible government to ensure that taxes remain low and Alberta remains the most popular place to raise a family, invest, and create jobs.

We also want to ensure that Albertans are getting the most out of their hard-earned money. The first goal is to align Alberta's spending with other comparable provinces. The second goal is to make sure that the debt we take on can be paid back by keeping below 30 per cent of GDP. By the end of this three-year plan debt will be less than 20 per cent of the GDP. The third goal is to set a time frame for balancing the budget and repaying debt. This will be done once the pandemic is over and Alberta's government has a clear idea of what the long-term global impacts are.

We campaigned on responsible spending, unlike the past government, who spent like money grew on trees. They had no plan to get our economy back on track, and they didn't have a world-wide pandemic hindering the economy. Our government knows that there is hope and a future for Albertans after this pandemic, and we

know that we can start building our economic recovery sooner rather than later. If it was up to the members opposite, Alberta would be in a much larger deficit than what we are right now. They would have no plans for reopening our economy and getting Albertans much-needed jobs. In all honesty, we would be in such a strict lockdown that all businesses across the province would be closing.

Our government has been doing a great job protecting lives and livelihoods. We have taken action when the pandemic was being harsh to Albertans but also provided the economic supports to businesses and Albertans when they needed them. I'm looking forward to our economic recovery, but I know this will involve a lot of work, not only from Alberta's government but also from Albertans. We need to work on a path forward towards economic diversification, continued support for our oil and gas sector, and supporting sectors that are boosting our economy like agriculture.

I'm very proud that my constituency of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville is involved in all of these key areas. We heavily support oil and gas by being the home of Alberta's Industrial Heartland. We have economic diversification through our hemp development. My constituency has a vast number of agricultural producers, and I'm happy to have them support our economy.

Budget 2021 is supported by many Albertans because this budget will support our strengths in the province. It is realistic and optimistic towards our future, and this is what many of us need right now. We need to be able to look forward to a province that supports job creation.

My favourite thing about Budget 2021 is the support for our communities while creating jobs. Instead of giving handouts, which resilient Albertans do not want, it gives them the opportunity to work. Much of Alberta's recovery plan involves investing back into our communities by building schools, roads, hospitals, and other infrastructure. It creates shovel-ready jobs, and that's what Albertans have been asking for. Albertans are ready to get back to work, and this budget allows them to do so.

I'm proud of Alberta's government for introducing such a well-thought-out budget that protects the lives and livelihoods of Albertans. I'm excited for our path forward and can't wait to see my constituents and all Albertans thrive.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there other members? I recognize the Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I am pleased to rise today and speak to the budget, in part because I think that the budget is probably one of the most fundamental things that a government can do. I think that at the end of the day there is nothing that speaks more strongly to the values of a group of people than what they actually invest in, and I think the thing that is most clear, from two years under this government, is that the UCP have not produced jobs. They have lost jobs.

Now, certainly, the pandemic has been responsible for some of that, but 50,000 jobs were lost in this province before the pandemic even hit. The Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, who spoke immediately before me, even admitted it, that Albertans look forward to a time when they can see job growth, and I think that at this point Albertans are looking forward to that time in 2023.

I think that when I look at this budget and when I look at the comments on this budget, you know, this government has paid lip service to changing their failed plan. We saw job losses, major job losses, before the pandemic. The plan for jobs hasn't created a single job, not one job yet. Yet it gave away billions of dollars from the

provincial Treasury. We see lip service to changing this plan but then no actual action.

You know, the government has moved off its former position that ESG factors in investment are simply a passing fad that ought to be ignored. They now claim to understand the importance of those factors. They claim that they're going to work to stop driving investment away, as they have done for two years, and start attracting that investment. At the same moment that they claim that, they give the advertising budget for the ESG secretariat to the war room, one of their main components that is driving investment away from this province, that is driving jobs away from this province. It's all well and good that the government has changed what they're saying, but they haven't changed what they're doing.

4:30

They've also shifted from this diversification-is-a-luxury rhetoric that they had going on to: we're investing. But they're investing with half as much money and without acknowledging the harm that they did. They love to talk about what a great year 2019 was for tech. Well, of course 2019 was a great year because we always see job growth follow investment. The NDP government attracted that investment, and we saw job growth follow. Then 2020 was a bad year. Sure, the pandemic had an impact; absolutely it did. But it wasn't just the pandemic. It was the UCP cutting those diversification programs. In the last budget they tripled down on a failed strategy to give money to those businesses who need it the least, the ones posting profits in excess of \$500,000 a year, while they leave small businesses to struggle during the pandemic.

Madam Chair, if there's one thing I could say to this government, it would be to quote Dr. Seuss. "You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself any direction you choose." Yet rather than choosing to steer themselves, rather than choosing to steer us, all we get is complaints, complaints about how the world is so terribly unfair, how they're not given a fair shake, how it's not their fault that all they've done is lose jobs throughout their entire term. Actually, they're the government. They have all the tools. They can produce a budget. They can pass their legislation. They have every lever available to them, and they choose not to use them.

Before I continue on the main thrust of my argument, I do want to have one small digression. I had the opportunity to see my friend in Justice estimates, and I think I have huge concerns – huge concerns – because the cuts in Justice will cause Jordan problems. They will. Cases will get Jordaned out. Digital courts, which were under way in my term but which I can't even take credit for because it was under way before me, which they claim are going to save us, are not enough to offset that. I've seen those budgets. I've seen them inside out and backwards. I've explained them, and I can tell you that those changes are enough to offset population growth. In fact, we see matters going through court often outstripping population growth. Those are offset by those things, but it doesn't offset cuts. Those are going to be problems.

One thing that I do have to say is that one of the worst cuts is to benefits for victims. In 2019 the cost of benefits to victims of crime was in excess of \$20 million a year. This year it's estimated to be less than \$5 million. We're seeing a bigger draw on the victims of crime fund, but that money is not going in benefits to victims. It's going to support police, which is an important priority. I don't disagree that it's an important priority, but you can't cut the money available to victims by 75 per cent. That's not fair. It's taking from those who can least afford it. What it signals is that this government has no intention on following through on the review that they're doing on victims of crime.

Currently they're required to apply within 45 days of the event. For traumatized families who've lost a loved one, for survivors of

sexual or domestic assaults 45 days is not enough. That's why the budget goes down. It's because those people will not be applying, and they won't be receiving money. There's a lot going on in this budget. There's a lot to complain about, but I think it's worth noting that component because I think it takes from the least able to afford it.

Moving on to the Energy budget, I think one of the big outcomes of my discussions in estimates was what happened to \$19 million, Madam Chair. A little about process. I know that the larger world frequently doesn't care about process, but I think it's important, because estimates are the time when the opposition, when community groups, when the public gets a window into the budget. I sat on the other side of estimates for four years. I answered those questions, and never once – never once – did I take the position that the opposition didn't have the right to know what we spent money on. Never once did I take the position that the public didn't have the right to know what the government spent their money on. Yet I sat there and listened to the minister say: "We're not going to tell you. We spent \$19 million on other industry advocacy, and we're not going to tell you what we spent it on. We don't have to."

I think that that is untrue, but it is so indicative of this minister and this government's approach to governing, that the public doesn't have the right to know, and I think that that is extremely, extremely problematic. If there is one thing that the public has the right to know, it's how the budget is being spent. I would challenge members of the opposition to point to a single instance in which any one of our ministers ever took a position like that, that the public didn't have a right to know what the money was being spent on. I can just picture the faces of former PC and Wildrose MLAs had I sat there and said: yeah, I spent \$19 million; I don't know what I spent it on, and I don't feel like I have to tell you. I think that that is shocking.

The Keystone XL is another example in exactly that line. I know it's been said over and over again, but it bears repeating. The government admits in the documents that they lost at least – at least – \$1.3 billion in Albertans' money making a risky bet that Donald Trump would win the U.S. election. That is the entire cost of the budget for Justice and Solicitor General for a year, \$1.3 billion. Just think of the investments we could have made in restorative justice, to support struggling parents and teachers at a time that has been unprecedentedly difficult for them, to invest in affordable child care, in health care in the middle of a pandemic, but this is what this government chose to do with it.

They chose to place a bet, and they didn't even book it. Again, it sounds procedural, but it's about transparency at the end of the day. Last year the Auditor General called the government out. They told them that they had to book \$100 million for the Keystone XL project, that not booking it was improper. This year they chose not to book any of that money, and they didn't even speak to the Auditor General. They didn't even ask if that was going to be appropriate accounting procedure. The strategy appears just to be to push problems out, to not look at them, to not deal with them. That's a significant concern.

Another significant concern is that one of the amendments that we brought to the budget – because, like anything else, it can be amended – was to drop the budget for industry advocacy. Why? Not because we don't think that's important. In fact, it's incredibly important. I think that there can be very few more important things that a government can do than to attract investment, particularly now, particularly at a time when Albertans are struggling, when so many are out of work. The thing that they need, the thing that they want, the thing that is top of mind for them is jobs. So there is no more important function than to attract investment. This industry advocacy budget could very well have been money well spent.

I'll give you an example. When the NDP was in government, we did spend millions of dollars, \$10 million I believe, advertising into the rest of the country, advertising about the benefits, the safety, the cost benefits of pipelines. While we were doing that, we measured the impact we had. We did polling on opinions in other provinces outside Alberta about pipelines, and the support was around 40 per cent. Then we did the ad campaign and then we did polling again, and the support went up to almost 70 per cent. That is an effective campaign. It is an effective way to speak to that moderate middle out there and to get people to change their opinion based on facts. You know, that moved us ahead. It ensured that the Trans Mountain pipeline was able to get approved and to start construction, and that is a big deal. It is a big deal for Alberta and for jobs and for our biggest industry.

4:40

Instead, we see that \$19 million, almost two-thirds of the advocacy budget, can't be accounted for. We're unable to point to a single metric that's specifically aimed at determining an impact, positive or negative, at any of this advocacy or the war room. It's possible to measure these things. It's possible to measure the impact on investment. It's possible to measure the impact on public opinion, and this government is choosing not to do it. We proposed to cut this budget to save \$27 million next year. We think that \$27 million can be used to achieve a significant number of other things, but the government voted that down.

I'd like to speak as well, briefly, about the cuts to postsecondary, which have been devastating. Students are faced with higher tuition, they're faced with more debt, and they're faced, worse still, with higher interest on that debt, and all that to buy reduced programming. The idea of performance-based funding – I always laugh. It's something that I refer to as a Harper special, basically calling something the opposite of what it actually does. Basically, it's tying something to arbitrary metrics, metrics which do not actually meaningfully measure performance.

These measures are arbitrary because they don't account for the value of postsecondary, for the importance of critical thinking and information analysis in a time where there is so much so-called information out there but so little of it is any good. It doesn't account for how creativity actually works, how science actually progresses in reality, how developments and advancements and new ideas are born, essentially how entrepreneurship works, how new ideas and new technologies that will move our province forward are created. The metrics that are being proposed simply don't measure for those things appropriately. If you want to create new sectors in an economy, if you want to grow an economy in new and interesting ways, cutting postsecondary is probably one of the worst things you could possibly do.

On the topic of jobs, this budget does very little for them. The UCP claim they will advocate effectively for our energy sector. They finally admit that ESG factors are not a passing fad. They hand the advertising budget over to the war room, the organization that's creating the problem in the first place.

What about the critical worker benefit? This was supposed to help workers at the height of the pandemic. This was supposed to be money that went into the pockets of those workers when they needed it most and at a time when they would have spent it in the local economy, when they would have spent that money to support small business. We know that. I mean, study after study has demonstrated that middle- and low-income workers given additional money are way more likely to spend it in the local economy, and that's way more likely to cause economic growth.

So at a time when small businesses could have used that support, we didn't get the money out the door, and I think that that is extremely

problematic. Ultimately, the program rolled out. It was late. It was confusing. It was difficult to administer. It added red tape to small businesses. It should have helped our economy, but it wasn't a government priority, so it didn't move forward.

Education: another big topic that is on the mind of so many parents, because in this time, when their children are stressed out and struggling – and we know that children who are stressed out have a hard time learning. You know, we have people isolating all the time because they made the decision not to reduce the cohorts, not to reduce the class sizes, so people are isolating almost twice as much as they would have with 15-person classes. That's highly problematic. It's stressful for the whole family, especially the student.

They got rid of EAs; 20,000 educational workers fired before the pandemic started, at a time when children needed EAs the most in order to access education. To me the true tragedy of that is that, in my view, it denies children their fundamental right to education. Those children cannot access education without the support of those EAs. That's why those supports existed, and we've cut them off. We have cut them off from education, an opportunity they will never get back that could have changed the course of their lives. Meanwhile this government is attempting to create jobs by blowing the tops off mountains, the very thing that attracts people to come here and to work in Alberta, that attracts businesses to open in Alberta.

At the end of the day, Madam Chair, I think the thing that is most important about a budget is that it shows our values, and what it demonstrates about this government is that what it values are the Walmarts of the world and overseas investors. At a time when income inequality is so high, when workers struggle, when middle-class families struggle, we see this government not just failing to help them, failing to act to create jobs but making their situation actively worse by withdrawing educational supports from their kids, by withdrawing affordable child care from their kids, by allowing their insurance rates to skyrocket, by the sort of lack of concern for electricity affordability.

This budget and many of the investments in it lack fundamental projections on the number of jobs that will be created. That should be this government's number one priority – number one priority. I don't know why the members opposite think that jobs are funny, but I certainly am hearing from my constituents that jobs are a huge concern for them. It's what this government ran on. It's what they promised to the people of Alberta: jobs. They have just walked away from that promise. I think that's devastating. I understand why people are devastated.

You know, I feel like this budget is just an exercise in performative austerity, spending millions to save thousands as long as it hurts people because then it looks like austerity, but that's not what it should be about. It should be about spending money effectively, spending money to achieve measurable aims, spending money to achieve things that help people of this province to get them back to work, to support them through this pandemic, to ensure that they have the things that they need. The games played with the numbers in this budget are shocking to me. There's no accountability, no transparency, and they seem to genuinely believe they don't owe the public a single explanation.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? I will recognize the hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Chair. It is my privilege to rise today in support of Alberta's 2021 budget. As we debate this

year's budget, I would like to take the time to explicitly thank the Minister of Finance and the President of Treasury Board and his team for the work that they have done on this year's budget. Planning a budget during this time of global pandemic is difficult, to say the least, and I would like to say: job well done on getting it presented in time prior to the coming fiscal year.

Increasing our health care budget by nearly \$1 billion compared to last year makes it abundantly clear that we are supporting the issues of today and supporting the sectors that need it most in this pandemic. On top of the \$21.4 billion in non-COVID health care spending, which is nearly a billion dollars more than last year, the government has set aside another \$1.25 billion in contingency specifically to fight the pandemic. This is the most ever spent on health care by any government in our province's history, and that doesn't even include the \$143 million we will spend over the next three years to build new health care facilities. Additionally, we are revitalizing rural medical facilities, again, taking care of what needs the most attention right now.

Madam Chair, as my colleagues have remarked, the only way out of this pandemic is to get through it, and we have committed the appropriate funding to address this issue, support the high demand on our health care system, and establish a path forward with hospital projects, revitalization projects, and construction of new facilities. We are making this historic investment in health care to ensure the health system will have the capacity to address both the pandemic as well as the other health needs of Albertans.

4:50

I would also like to point out that Alberta remains a leader in vaccinations. With the \$1.25 billion in contingency this ensures that Alberta will remain a leader in pandemic response and vaccine administration. As of Monday, March 22, we have administered over 497,000 vaccinations, with 93,544 people fully vaccinated. This is great news for Alberta and for our province's recovery. The job is not finished, but our government will work to ensure that this stays on track and that the vaccination plan is rolled out effectively.

In addition to health care spending we are investing \$1.7 billion more in capital funding in 2021-22 than was planned for in Budget 2020. Our three-year capital plan is now over \$20 billion and will support 90,000 new jobs through to 2024. As one of my colleagues noted yesterday, if we are going to plan for the future, we need to build for the future. Infrastructure upgrades and investments in agriculture, tourism, and technology will establish a solid foundation for Alberta's future prosperity and will help modernize these sectors.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The capital plan honours previous commitments to build and maintain key infrastructure projects and includes additional investment into health care facilities, school projects, and transportation networks. The plan focuses on things like roads, bridges, and overpasses, which are critical projects that create jobs and help make the lives of Albertans easier. Infrastructure projects like these are important to the functioning of our society as they haul supplies to and from Alberta's energy industry, the forestry industry as well as our agricultural industry. On top of this, it also funds the building of new schools in communities right across Alberta, which will create thousands of construction jobs and set our students up for success well into the future. Our government values the education students receive and are dedicated to supporting them in their educational endeavours.

Developments like these are necessary to establish a competitive future for this province by investing in critical infrastructure in our communities. Planning for our future means taking care of our health care system, especially with the current pandemic. The government

of Alberta dedicated \$23 billion towards health care. This includes infrastructure, health benefits, children's health supports, and mental health and addictions services. This is unprecedented in Alberta's history. We have committed the necessary funds to address multiple issues, support demands on our health care system, and establish a path forward.

Mr. Chair, the Bank of Montreal, the National Bank, the Conference Board of Canada, and others have projected that Alberta will lead Canada in economic growth, will lead Canada in job growth in 2021. The National Bank projects that Alberta will lead the nation with a 6 and a half per cent GDP growth.

Mr. Chair, in closing, I believe this budget is about ensuring that Albertans receive the services they need both now and in the future. We are anchoring our spending to three strong fiscal anchors: number one, to keep net debt to below 30 per cent of GDP; number two, to deliver services more cost-effectively by bringing spending in line with other comparator provinces to ensure that we get full value for every tax dollar; and number three, by re-establishing a plan to balance the budget postpandemic.

Mr. Chair, a brighter future is ahead, and I want to thank the Finance minister for ensuring this budget was prepared in a timely manner. While other governments have failed to put their budgets in place on time, this government has put a plan in place that I will support.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has risen.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this budget. It's always good to be up in this House and speaking to the people of Alberta, who are watching us and will hear about this debate, particularly at a time when things are so stressful for the citizens of this great province. Their hope is that the government will be their partner in moving forward. Unfortunately, I'm sure they already see that those hopes are largely misplaced with this government. Really, what we're seeing in this budget is a continuation of the pattern of two years of economic incompetence that this government has demonstrated over and over again since the day that they took over in this province and their complete inability to learn from past experience and to change the direction that they're going in but, rather, continuing down this path that demonstrates very little understanding of economics in the modern age and very little understanding of what should happen.

We have a government that has found themselves with the highest unemployment that we've seen in this province in recent years, the largest deficit that we've seen in many years, and the largest debt that we've seen in many years. All the indicators of economic success, essentially, are indicating that this government has failed to appropriately address the circumstances of the modern era and has been really unable to either read the situation or to design appropriate mechanisms to respond to the situation. This budget is notable for its lack of thoughtfulness, its lack of effort, and its inability to actually achieve an outcome which is consistent with the desires and needs of the citizens of this province.

We have a government that has thrown away literally billions of dollars because of their blind ideology and their inability to understand economic processes and how they happen and what the likely outcome is for the ridiculous decisions that they make. They've thrown away over a billion dollars on a failed bet on a foreign election, completely wasting money that could have been put – as one of the previous speakers, Calgary-Mountain View,

mentioned, that literally is as much as the full budget for Justice in this province. They've just thrown that away.

They lost money by cancelling rail contracts when private industry was increasing their oil-by-rail contracts and making tons of money off it. This government got out of an already established contract and lost the opportunity to make some money for the citizens of this province.

This government has failed to renew the renewable energy program that was an incredible success in driving a great price for electricity in this province, lower than anyone ever expected. In fact, when it was announced what the price was, there were literal gasps throughout the room at how incredibly good the price was. Subsequently that has been demonstrated to have provided the province of Alberta with a significant amount of money for our budget, so we were making a profit off this program. This government failed in this budget to reinstitute the renewable energy program.

I also want to point out that that renewable energy program facilitated three First Nations communities – one in Treaty 6, one in Treaty 7, and one in Treaty 8 – in participating in providing electricity for the whole province and providing for the well-being of their own communities. It was an extremely successful program in all actual measures in terms of actually having First Nations get a contract and provide excellent service to the province of Alberta and provide for their communities. All of that is lost because this government actually really doesn't get economics at all. I'm very disappointed in that.

We know that they also gave away billions of dollars in tax deductions to major corporations, many of whom are actually foreign corporations, money that is leaving not only the province of Alberta but leaving Canada and creating benefits in other parts of the world, when we could have focused instead on the well-being of Albertans.

5:00

Now, you might even be a bit supportive of it if you thought this was a philosophical point of view where lowering the cost for corporations would help to provide some kind of outcome, but all the evidence presented in this House from this side of the House indicated, before they did this, that, in fact, these kinds of reductions in corporate taxes do not produce benefits, do not produce jobs overall. In fact, we know that primarily corporations take that extra money that they get from not paying reasonable levels of taxes in the province of Alberta, and they simply buy back their own shares to increase their own bottom line and pay more to executives that are earning multimillions of dollars a year. That's exactly what we saw. In fact, we also saw one corporation use the money to shut down their headquarters in Calgary and to move out of the province. How's that for economic incompetence, that this government has demonstrated? We know that they've done that.

If they had coupled that with some understanding of the fact that small businesses actually hire more people in this province and done something to support small businesses, you might have even been tempted to try to understand where they're going with this and try to be supportive when you can. But they didn't do that. They neglected small businesses at the same time. They simply went to a very small group of their corporate friends, who provide significant amounts of money into the coffers of this particular government's political party and activities, and they gave them a present, thanks to the people of Alberta. They literally did a transfer of money from the average Albertan to major foreign corporations. Who does that benefit? Nobody in Alberta except for a few large corporations and a particular political party. This is the kind of incompetence that we've seen over time.

We've also seen them waste tons of money on a war room which has done absolutely nothing to help us in this province, even in the

area where they ostensibly set up the war room to do the work. Apparently, they believed that somehow this war room was going to do something to increase investment in oil and gas, to garner for us a better relationship with the rest of the world, a better reputation for how we handle the environmental and economic balance that we all need to struggle with.

In fact, this war room has done exactly the opposite. It has become the laughingstock of corporate entities around the world. It's become a joke. The focus has been on ridiculously small and minor kinds of things. They couldn't even get their own logo right three times running. They spend more of their time arguing about children's cartoons than anything else, and they have not produced the outcomes that they're supposed to produce in terms of helping us to build an economy, helping us to get a good reputation around the world so people want to move to Alberta to invest in oil and gas and associated industries. That hasn't happened because this war room is incompetent, yet their budget has been renewed in this budget. It's incredible that the government chose to do that, to renew this war room, that has been so incompetent.

But, on top of that, they established the war room in such a way that we can't even ask good questions in this budget process about what happens in that war room, how that money is spent. They've actually decreased transparency. They hid the actual spending of dollars from Albertans in this budget. Again, that tells me that what's happening with this money is not about providing benefits and good things for the citizens of the province of Alberta but is helping some small enclave of people, some cabal that works together to benefit a group of wealthy individuals, many of whom don't even live in this country, and one particular party in this province. It's really unacceptable.

We've also seen them demonstrate their economic incompetence through a number of sole-sourced contracts to insider friends, doing things that are repetitions of things that already exist simply so that they can provide a contract to somebody who is their buddy and who provides some benefit back to the party that they represent. We've seen them create an Executive Council and Premier's office that spend more money and hire more people to do things than any previous government for many years.

We've seen them fail to actually take advantage of a number of opportunities to bring money into the province of Alberta, largely from the federal government, who has in fact been doing something for the people of Alberta during this COVID time. If you actually go through their budget – and they talk proudly about various things that they have been investing in. But then you stop and ask them: where do the dollars come from for those things? More often than not the answer is that these are not Alberta dollars; these are federal dollars. So they're depending on a federal government, which they constantly harass, to actually save them from their own incompetence.

I've seen them leave money on the table that should have been brought into this province – for example, critical workers' benefits, that should have been brought in months ago, six, eight months ago – and distributed around the province of Alberta so that people could maintain their mortgages when they were losing hours at work, so that people could ensure that they could maintain the lifestyle that has allowed Alberta to be one of the best places to live over the last many years, so that people could help themselves at a time when their jobs were becoming increasingly precarious and less satisfactory in terms of their ability to provide economic well-being for them. That's what they could have done.

They could have helped the Alberta economy by bringing money in that would then circulate over and over again in this economy, because that's how the economy works. It's not how many dollars you have; it's how much those dollars circulate in the economy that makes a difference, and this is something this government absolutely

fails to understand. If they brought those dollars in and they gave them to people, those people would be spending those dollars in their local shops. They'd be calling up the local restaurants and ordering food. They would be buying clothes in local shops. They would be going for local entertainment, and they'd be looking for their needs to be met through local industry. All of those dollars that would have circulated seven, eight, nine times over the last year have been completely lost by this government's continued economic incompetence, that I've been outlining here.

We see that they have time and time again refused to accept that other people have already gotten the work done and that if they were to enhance that work, we would get extreme benefit from it. Instead, they want to not use the federal COVID app; they want to not use the AHS emergency opioid app. They don't want to use those because somebody else created them, and they want to spend some money with their friends, with that small group of people that they like to provide resources to for some – I'm very concerned – very wrong-headed benefit to themselves.

If they wanted to save money, they would work in partnership with these kinds of people. They would say: "Great. You've already done a lot of the work for us. Why don't we work with you and make it work for our province and make things better?" But they don't. They simply neglect to understand that other people have been doing stuff for Alberta, from the federal government, from AHS, and other great groups, that could have been a benefit to us if they had simply decided to work in partnership with them. But not being good with money, they'd rather go and spend some money to repeat what has already been created elsewhere.

5:10

At the same time, they have made life more expensive for average Albertans consistently, time and time again. The list of fees that have gone up in this province is dramatic. The list of costs to you as an Albertan that you will pay this year is a page long. When we see the kinds of things that are there – your insurance costs will be up this year because they took off the cap; your electricity costs will be up this year because they took off the cap; your fees for parks are going up this year; fees for registrations, fees for licences, all going up this year – the only thing that is not going up is affordability. That's going down. This government has absolutely no understanding of your budget. As well, they have no understanding of their own budget. They think you have more money for absolutely everything, and they're more than prepared to find ways to make you pay it to them. While they decrease corporate taxes, they actually increased your individual taxes.

You know, I've spent my time talking about a lot of the overall incompetencies of the financial thinking of this government. I think that's true, but I'm also very disappointed that they didn't use this budget to do something for the people in the province of Alberta that actually reflects the circumstances we're in. We know that this has been a very difficult time for many small businesses and a very difficult time for many employees during the COVID era because of the new precariousness of business and the new precariousness of work. We know that many people have had to shut the doors of their shops, some temporarily and some, unfortunately, permanently. We know that many employees have had to reduce the number of hours that they actually are working or, in some cases, have lost their jobs altogether and have been unemployed for significant levels of time. We know that because the unemployment rate is the highest it has been for many, many years in this province due to the incompetence of this government.

This government could have used this budget to deal with those issues. This government could have said: the issue here is that our homegrown businesses, our small mom-and-pop shops, our folks

that provide employment for a significant number of the citizens of this province could really use a hand up right here, could really use some benefit. What happened? Did they get the money out the door for the small businesses? No, they didn't. They made a plan, and they didn't even follow through with their full plan. They didn't take advantage of all of the possible federal programs that would have helped small businesses either.

They have no plan here to deal with the fact that work has become more precarious. They have no plan here to deal with the fact that many people are now working part-time jobs with no benefits, with no pension plans, and with no sick leave days. We're in the middle of a pandemic, and a significant number of our population have no sick leave days, and they have included nothing in this budget to deal with those realities. The things that are happening to you today they're not dealing with. They're not saying: let's try to find a way to get us all through this difficult time. They're not dealing with precarious work.

When they do talk about jobs – and I know they like to talk about it even though they've done nothing for jobs, as previously pointed out by the Member for Calgary-Mountain View – they have a ridiculously simplistic view of jobs. You hear them stand up in the House all the time saying that businesses are the job creators. While I certainly celebrate the role that businesses have in creating jobs, no intelligent businessperson has ever created a job until there were the circumstances for that job to be successful. Nobody says: "Gee, I've got some extra money at the end of the year. Why don't I just create a bunch of jobs doing whatever?" It doesn't work that way. You don't just create jobs because you want them. Jobs are created in response to a very complex web of circumstances in society. If you really want to create jobs, you have to understand that.

Workers understand that. Workers know that they cannot fully engage in a situation of employment unless other things are going well and are well set up in their life as well; for example, something as simple as good housing. Do you have a place to stay? Is it a good place to stay? Is it a good place to have your family? If you don't have that, you're not going to be able to show up at work, or if you show up at work, you're not going to be able to focus on what's happening because you're so worried.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and to my colleagues, for this opportunity to engage in discussion of the budget, which, of course, is one of the most significant pieces of legislation a government brings forward during a term, during a sitting of the session. I know that there have been some comments given about commending the government on meeting the legal requirements of presenting a budget. I wouldn't say that just doing it is good enough to get a pass. I would say that one of the most basic requirements of a governing party is to present a budget, because we are elected to this place and entrusted to act in the best interests of all Albertans and to bring forward policies, plans, procedures, and indeed budgets in allocation of our shared resources, our collective assets to invest in one another and invest in creating a more equitable and just society for all.

When I talk about investments, I mean those seriously. I don't see investments in things like health care, education, child care, advanced education as leeches on society. I see those as investments in our society. I see what we do to one another in terms of where we choose to support one another and the programs we choose to put in place as being core to what our values are as a society, and

we are here as representatives of that society to make decisions for the collective will.

Before I get into some of the details as they specifically relate to the budget that I feel have veered very far from what society expects from us and what our constituents expect from us, I want to talk a little bit about the process because this process has been quite different this year. You may have noticed that I'm not saying the number \$4.7 billion, because the government has chosen to take that level of transparency away from the budget this year. In their first budget they did actually talk about what the opportunity cost was of their decisions around making profitable corporations, large profitable corporations, only those making in excess of half a million dollars in profits annually, pay less in taxes. Everyone else is going to pay the same or more. Actually, many, many are paying more because of grid creep, that the government intentionally chose to act on in their last budget and continue on with in this budget. That grid creep means that on personal income tax in the first year Albertans are paying \$100 million more, \$200 million more in the second year, \$300 million more in the third year, so \$600 million more.

This is something that many Conservatives, including the leader of the governing party, the Premier, have advocated very strongly against – I would say even more than advocated – have fought ferociously against in the past, but now under this government, under this Premier's leadership, they're moving full speed ahead on it.

So when I talk about that \$4.7 billion that's been prioritized to be given to large profitable corporations over ordinary folks, I'm not sure that's the right number this year because the government has actually taken that number completely out of the budget. It used to be on page 144 of the first budget in black and white. I know some members are laughing. But I paid very close attention, and I looked at the same parallel sections in the subsequent budgets, and there isn't even a cost identified in these budgets.

Another area where there's considerable erosion of transparency and, I would say, the democratic principles that go into making decisions around a budget is the business plan. The business plan might not be the sexiest page in any budget – it should be many, many pages – but it speaks to your values. Just like in any corporation, you speak to your investors about what your goals are for the corporation, what your goals are for the money that's being entrusted to you by the shareholders in your corporation. To me, when we're in government, our business plans are our covenant or our commitment to the folks of this province, the more than 4.3 million shareholders that we have that entrust us with making decisions that fulfill our commitment to the public.

5:20

When the government takes business plans in Education and cuts them from what they were before, about 10 pages – I had the absolute number before; I think it was 11, actually – down to two, one double-sided piece of paper, and says, "These are our priorities," we used to have about five times that many. We used to have very clear, focused outcomes that related to safe and caring schools, that related to high school completion, that related to outcomes for indigenous learners, that were specific metrics that were committed to be measured on a regular basis. Now, instead, we're going to roll all that up and maybe have one value statement, but we're not going to have specific metrics that we're going to be reporting on publicly.

It wasn't just in Education; the same was the case in Health. Those are two business plans where I've spent an extensive period of time, as I hope many members of this House have, going through the different objectives and the different measures where we were going to hold government and one another to account for those

decisions on behalf of all Albertans. When those are taken out, it erodes that level of transparency.

When we asked questions about this in estimates, we said: you know, why have you eliminated all of the objectives related to creating safe, caring, and inclusive school environments? We were told by the minister that that wasn't the minister's goal, that that was done through the Finance/Treasury Board process, which is deeply concerning given that we all have, I would say, an onus on us to make sure that we are being clear, consistent, and open with the people of Alberta around what our objectives are in this place and how we are investing our collective resources, including money from taxpayers, including royalty revenue, including taxation from corporations. For this money, that we all share, we have, I would say, an obligation to speak clearly about what our objectives are and how we plan on delivering those objectives to Albertans. That is another area of significant erosion of trust and confidence in terms of public sharing of information.

The last one I'm going to speak to is the lack of actual engagement through the budget process itself. I have been watching the budget process in this place very closely for many, many years, longer than I've been elected. I've never seen that level of evasion and that level of refusal to give answers to clear questions as we did in this year's process. I've never seen that many ministers refuse to share time and go back and forth. It was at one point an actual goal of members of this Assembly to get enough information for everyone to feel confident in the decisions that we were making collectively. A refusal to share time, a refusal to answer questions, a refusal to commit to tabling the answers to those questions that went unanswered in this House before the budget would be passed: I've never seen that degree of dysfunction. I've never seen that degree of refusal to be transparent and accountable when it comes to decisions in the budget.

For example, many, many Albertans have been asking me about the money for the rollout of the curriculum. Curriculum is a massive undertaking. It was a big piece, I know, in the Premier's leadership campaign when he was running for leader of the UCP, that he was going to, you know, do this big curriculum overhaul. The line item where it says in the budget that we'll be funding the curriculum overhaul is less budgeted for this upcoming year than we're actually spending in this current year.

So how can we expect that next year – and here we are. I want to acknowledge the terrible numbers that we saw today in terms of the growth of the variants, that have already sort of sunk in here in Alberta, and original COVID, which is also deeply concerning here in the province of Alberta. At a time when we're seeing numbers on a growing trend in those regards and when parents are trying to anticipate how they're going to meet the needs of their children, many have reached out to me saying that this is the second, third, or fourth time that their children have had to isolate.

Secondary students, of course, were sent home. All Alberta students were sent home around this time last year. Then secondary students were sent home in November for a significant period. Those are the province-wide ones, and then, of course, there were significant changes as well any time that there's been a close contact or there has been an outbreak in a school. We know that this has caused a lot of stress and chaos and anxiety for Alberta families.

So next year, when students go back to school – and many, many more will go than there were this year. Many are in school right now, but even more will be next year. The numbers of students are anticipated to go up, not just the ones learning in person but overall in Alberta, a growth of 20,000 students from the number of students who are participating in education right now, whether that be at home or whether it be in-person learning. So 20,000 more students next year, and the budget documents show 2,000 fewer educational staff – educational assistants and teachers – in the government's

own documents, than pre-COVID levels. We're going to have 20,000 more students registered, 2,000 fewer adults there to support them.

There have been huge educational gaps during this last year for many, many students. There have been emotional, social, and mental health gaps as well, and instead of the government putting forward a plan, a budget that says, "We acknowledge all of the hardships that families have faced," we see the government continue to move forward with what they spin as flat funding. They spin it this way because they aren't acknowledging the fact that there are going to be fewer staff and more students, which, we all know, means that everyone is going to get less who is actually there.

This budget, I think, doesn't acknowledge the realities that we have in terms of our educational needs, in terms of our health care needs, in terms of Albertans' strong and consistent desire to see economic diversification and job creation in this province, and one of the areas where we see a direct attack on that is in the Advanced Education budget. This is the third budget where we've seen cuts to Advanced Education, significant cuts, including \$700 million to the grants that postsecondaries use, and an increase of \$387 million in tuition costs. When the government says, "Oh, a billion-dollar gap," that's what we're talking about. We're talking about \$700 million in cuts and more than \$300 million more in tuition increases.

Those tuition increases won't offset the costs of the cuts, obviously, about halfway there, and that gap is large and is growing. What it also says – and research is very clear on this – is that low- and middle-income families are less likely to take on personal debt if they don't have confidence that there will be an opportunity to regain that borrowing in terms of income earning, and in this province a lot of people are seeing the government download more personal debt on to ordinary families and no clear direction or commitment that there will be jobs for those students when they graduate. We're already among the lowest in terms of postsecondary participation rates in the country, and it's only going to get worse because of this budget.

You look at the erosion of supports for students in kindergarten through grade 12, the fact that disabled students who relied on that PUF support in the early years saw a huge erosion to that in this last budget and that that is going to continue this year while there are more students who will be registering in school. You also see postsecondary funding and supports being eroded. We don't see the kind of investment in true economic diversification that I think we're proposing as members of the Official Opposition and why we're encouraging people to participate in Alberta's future.

This is a conversation that has definitely brought in a lot of perspectives, including folks who traditionally engage with us but also many folks who don't traditionally engage with us, because they care about the future of this province. The government should show that they have a similar level of care. I don't think this budget reflects that. I don't think it reflects it in terms of the decisions and the priorities that are being made.

The fact that we continue to see large, profitable corporations get huge breaks while ordinary families are expected to pay more, the fact that we continue to see the cost of what was highlighted by my colleague the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, the at least \$1.3 billion that has been lost on a bet that Donald Trump would be re-elected President of the United States, a failed bet. If people were asked to bet their own money, many people wouldn't have taken that risk, but the government chose to bet the people's money on that initiative, knowing full well that there was significant risk tied to that investment and having made even deeper investments after the election. When it was clear that there was one candidate who won, that it was Joe Biden and that it wasn't Donald Trump, the government continued to double down on some of those investments in the early days in January, which again was so short-

sighted and, I think, was a real lack of confidence in the ability of this government – I think a lot of us have a lack of confidence to see this government assess the local, the global, the interjurisdictional changing waters.

5:30

I think another significant example of that is the government doubling down on the embarrassment that is the energy war room. We continue to see that, for example, in this budget there are no schools being built for Calgary public students and none for residents within the city of Calgary who are Catholic either. We could basically fund the top priority for each jurisdiction in their year 1 ask if we would simply reprioritize the money from the war room to classrooms. It's that clean. It's that simple. I think that many Calgarians would feel that that would be a better investment in them and their families and the potential for their city and for our province as we all have a vested interest in the success of students as we move forward.

Those are some of my biggest concerns with this budget. I again want to say that I think that if the government was very proud of this, they would be more forthcoming in sharing information about it when it comes to actually debating the estimates process, they would commit to answering questions that were asked for simple information in writing and be able to give that to people before being asked to vote on this budget, and they would not have acted in the way they did around the business plans. It is very disrespectful to the more than 4 million Albertans who rely on the government to deliver on its commitments when it comes to making decisions around the resources we have to support one another and the investments we make in our society.

With that, I cede the remainder of my time, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise and make some more comments on the budget. The budget is – yeah. It continues to be, for me, one of my – I guess I think it's one of the most important functions of government, and I think it's one of the most important things for me to comment on as a member of this Assembly. The budget, again, is where the government signals its values, and in this case those values do not align with the values of my constituents. My constituents are concerned about their jobs. They're concerned about the economy. They're concerned about affordability. They're concerned about their children and the education of their children. They're concerned about diversification. None of those things are supported in this budget.

I think the first thing I want to say is that, to me, one of the most important things about politics, one of the things that made me want to go into this job in the first place is that decisions should be made based on facts. I think that's incredibly – incredibly – important. One of the facts that we should be considering is that population and inflation are things that exist. Population growth and inflation are real. They are real things that occur in the world. And when we fail to account for those things, then we don't budget correctly. So to say that there will be 20,000 additional students in the system and no new money but “Hey, guys, it's not a cut” is just inaccurate. It's not accurate. It's not – well, I don't think I'm allowed to use that word in here, so I won't.

Ms Hoffman: You can tell me later.

Ms Ganley: I will. I will.

I can't say that enough. I think when we're making these decisions, we should make the decisions on the basis of fact, and those things are facts.

It's actually interesting. One of my first sort of really strong political opinions occurred around the federal government. It was the cancellation of the long-form census. That probably sounds really boring and procedural to a lot of people. Essentially, by cancelling the long-form census, the Conservative government of the day was saying to the people: you know, we're tired of being called out on not making our decisions on the basis of facts and information, so we're just going to stop gathering the facts and information, and that way no one will know what the facts are, no one will know what information is, so no one can call us out on the fact that we are making decisions that are contrary to the obvious fact. I mean, it's certainly a novel approach, but it speaks to values. It speaks to values that consider political points above what happens to the people you are governing, and I find that incredibly troubling.

I think there can be nothing that is more troubling than a government that says: we don't want the facts because we don't want to make decisions based on the facts; we're more interested in our own political future than we are in the lives and livelihoods of the people we govern. That is one of the things I got into politics to do, to be concerned with the day-to-day lives and livelihoods of the people that we govern. Those people are concerned about jobs, jobs that this government does not seem to be concerned about.

I think, you know, that there are a number of additional points to be made about the budget. To begin with, I must reiterate the at least \$1.3 billion bet that this government made on the election of President Trump. I seriously doubt that any of the government members bet their own money on that, yet they were more than happy to bet the money of Albertans despite the fact that it looked incredibly risky at the outset. The fact that they have resisted, with every fibre, with every opportunity, telling Albertans when they knew things, how those decisions were made, how much we're on the hook for, how much we might still be liable for does not, to me, speak to a government that is proud of their work. If you're proud of your work, you're eager to show it. You don't try to hide it. You don't refuse to answer questions about it. I think that's incredibly problematic.

We see in this budget, too, a \$2.5 billion slush fund, basically. It's been committed and recommitted and uncommitted by various ministers, you know, saying, “Oh, this will be invested in jobs; it will be used by the Energy ministry; it's going to be used in Health,” and then the Finance minister saying that no decisions have been made. We have no idea what's happening with this money. We have ministers saying that they're definitely getting it for projects that they intend to move forward with, and then we have the Finance minister saying: oh, I haven't approved anything. So they may or may not be getting it. I mean, who knows how many times this government is planning to spend that same money, if they plan to spend it at all, what they plan to spend it on?

One of the reasons I'm concerned about that is because we saw ministers taking the position over and over again that they don't owe Albertans an explanation on how they're spending their money. I think that's problematic. It's money that should go to the benefit of each and every one of us, and the very least the government can do is to answer questions about where that money went, about what it's being spent on. Now, we may not like the answers, the people of Alberta may not like the answers – it certainly seems that they don't – but at minimum the government owes those answers.

I think as well that one of the things that's most troubling is that, you know, we're seeing what my colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud described as a sort of K-shaped recovery; that is, those who did well throughout the pandemic, those who are already comparatively affluent – and I include us here in this Chamber with

that – recovering and those who were hurt most by the pandemic not recovering. A lot of those people are young people, and that concerns me a lot because it means that those young people don't want to stay here in Alberta because they don't see a future for themselves. That is a huge concern.

Income inequality is growing. I talk a lot about that in this place because I think it is incredibly problematic. I think, you know, it undercuts society. It undercuts democracy. I think this income inequality problem is big, but one of the things that needs to be noted about it is that there is a generational element to it. Those who are coming up now have a much harder time. I saw a study, and I wish I could remember now precisely what the name was, but essentially it was looking at the average cost of a house. This was two or three years ago now. Oh, it's probably only about a year ago. Anyway, it was the average cost of a house versus the average salary of an 18-to-25-year-old. While that salary had remained stagnant over decades, the cost of the house had gone up significantly.

5:40

What that means is that we have a middle class that can't afford what the middle class in previous generations had been able to afford, that is to say housing and food and being able to send their kids to university, not a luxurious lifestyle, just the sort of basics that we all aspire to. I think that's problematic, and I think what we see is that this government is unconcerned about the fact that that problem is going to get significantly worse as a result of COVID and seems to be doing nothing to stop that.

In fact, they're doing quite the opposite. By decreasing taxes on only those companies posting profits in excess of \$500,000 a year while doing very little to support small businesses, you know, they allow additional profits that do not vest in jobs. I think we've seen it fairly clearly. A lot of those companies took that money and left the jurisdiction. We see that profit vesting in overseas investors, going to those who need it the least while we lack jobs for middle-class families.

You know, I find it interesting because every time I say something like this, the members of the government call me a socialist. I just think it's a very peculiar definition of socialism to suggest that middle-class families should be able to survive. I mean, that's just a bizarre definition of socialism. Yeah, I think that middle-class families should be able to survive. I think that two people working hard at whatever job, whether those jobs are manual labour jobs or not, whether those jobs require a university education or not, should be able to have a home and raise their children and buy food. I don't think that that is an extraordinary request. I think that that is the basic thing that we should expect our government to work towards, and that is what I don't see in this budget.

You know, if you take that \$1.3 billion that this government bet on Trump's re-election and think about what would have happened if we invested that in small businesses here in the province, supporting them through the pandemic – think about what would have happened if we invested that in people in this province. I mean, think about what would have happened if we had even made moves in a timely manner to invest hundreds of millions of dollars coming from the federal government in those people, how much better they could have been supported throughout this pandemic.

I think, for me, that is the biggest problem that I have with this budget, that it doubles down on worsening that income inequality. It doubles down on a situation where middle-class families are struggling, and this government is not only not helping, but they're trying to do everything they can to use money in a way that makes that worse. I see that as extremely problematic.

I think that when I hear stories from my constituents about how much they are struggling right now on a day-to-day basis and then I hear the

government talk about how optimistic they are about that income inequality worsening, about the lack of jobs that my constituents are struggling with, about the lack of affordability, it really makes me sad. I think that it is a shirking of very basic responsibility, and I think that if there is one story to be told out of this budget, that is it. I would call it the government's shirking of very basic responsibilities.

With that, Mr. Chair, I will take my seat.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I will speak not very long because we're coming up to that time, 5:55, where I will say that we'll rise and report our progress. Just cue me for that.

I want to also say that, along with my colleagues here, I will not be supporting this budget. I'll be voting against it because I think there are in it, obviously, cuts to health care, education, front-line services that can't be supported, Mr. Chair. There are cuts to postsecondary education in this province that can't be supported.

We were, as a government, when we were in government, building a made-in-Alberta plan to build an economy where nobody was left behind, but what we see the government doing today and in previous budgets is building an economy where, really, only those who have the deepest pockets, those who are the richest, advance in our society. The great amount of money that was given to corporations and ostensibly under the agreement that the government made with corporations is: "We'll lower your corporate tax from 12 per cent to 8 per cent. You will invest that money back into Alberta, you will create jobs, and you will stimulate our economy." My colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford pointed out that anything but that happened, Mr. Chair. Corporations used that significant \$4.7 billion tax giveaway to line their own pockets, the shareholders' pockets, and Albertans have suffered.

I just want to point out, Mr. Chair, the historical fiscal summary here on page 186. It's very telling. The years from 2015-16 all the way up to 2018-19, of course, were the NDP government years, and if you take a look at the surplus and deficit, the deficit for those years started out at \$6.4 billion. The next year it went to \$10.8 billion, \$8 billion in the third year of our tenure, and then down to \$6.7 billion. In those four years I think the total of our four years was somewhere around \$41 billion of debt drawn down, deficit financing. In the two years that are actual and one year estimated, the UCP government has racked up \$51 billion in deficits. That, of course, goes to our debt, and the net debt, as we heard someone from the other side say, is going to be up to 30 per cent net debt to GDP. In our four years we never got above 10 per cent net debt to GDP. You know, I just point that out because there seems to be the misunderstanding from the other side that they're the great fiscal managers. When we take a look at what has actually happened, nothing could be further from the truth.

I want to just spend the few minutes that I have talking about Municipal Affairs. I know that there were significant cuts in the capital plan to MSI for municipalities around the province. That will effectively mean they can't use those monies to create jobs, to maintain our infrastructure throughout the province and maintain jobs throughout the province. The deep cuts that the UCP is making to municipal funding goes against what – when we were in government, we looked to former Bank of Canada governor David Dodge to help us with our countercyclical investment strategy. I see the UCP is essentially making it harder for municipalities down the road to invest and build and maintain the economic infrastructure in this province. That's really going against what communities need and what local governments require from a provincial government

or an order of government that has other abilities and resources to draw on revenues.

5:50

Those cuts, of course, to municipalities will lead to a couple of things. It'll lead to eventually steeper property taxes for municipalities, and it is already leading to municipal service level cuts throughout the province. We know that to be true because the downloading that is occurring on municipalities has to have some impact, and it will have one of those two impacts. The easiest thing to do at this point in time is for municipalities to reduce their service levels.

The UCP government has also continued to download costs for rural policing onto municipalities, and that's at historic levels now. The impact, again, will be on municipalities to come up with those funds. We know that changes to the disaster recovery program – it'll now be cost shared, and 10 per cent will be placed on communities. I'm not sure if that's communities that have that disaster or if it'll just be spread out across all municipalities in terms of charges. That will affect municipalities as well.

There will be increases to property taxes for the Education requisition, starting in 2020-22. That is going up to 32 per cent of the total expenditure of Education, something we froze and kept lower than 32 per cent, recognizing that municipalities had significant challenges. Those were recessionary years, a couple of them, when we were government, and then they were growth years and we led the country in economic growth for two years running. That's not happening in this province now, and it won't happen for, I would say, more than the anticipated time that members of the opposition get up and say that the projections and the forecasts say that we're going to be leading this and leading that. I would say: you know, don't count your chickens because there are many, many challenges still we have to undergo as a province.

We know that though there were repeatedly statements that there's money in the budget, that there's money in the budget for the green line, that economic development engine is not starting any time soon, Mr. Chair, because we've got a Minister of Transportation and an interim Minister of Municipal Affairs from Calgary who don't seem

to have faith in the work that has currently been done and the efforts of both consultants and the city of Calgary to sort that out as we go forward. I think that that's a mistake as well. We know that there are many, many other ministries here – I've mentioned a few of them off the top – that are receiving cuts when, really, they're part of the economic engine of this province and part of the reason we're a great province, and we will be again. But the current budget in the way it's set up misses the opportunity to invest in all sorts of things that will have greater return to this province in the future.

Mr. Chair, I think that at this point in time I would like to move that we rise and report progress.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Ms Lovely: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 60.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Does the Assembly concur in the report? All those in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. That is carried.

I see the hon. Deputy Government House Leader and Minister of Energy has risen.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the Assembly adjourn until 7:30 this evening, Wednesday, March 24, 2021.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:56 p.m.]

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