Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, November 26, 2019

Day 47

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
First Session

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Armstrong-Homeniuk, Jackie, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UCP)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UCP)
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Nally, Hon. Dale, Morinville-St. Albert (UCP)
Neudorf, Nathan T., Lethbridge-East (UCP)
Nicolaides, Hon. Demetrios, Calgary-Bow (UCP)
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Panda, Hon. Prasad, Calgary-Edgemont (UCP)
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United Conservative: 63 New Democrat: 24

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m. Tuesday, November 26, 2019

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, this morning I had the pleasure to meet with the consul general of the Czech Republic in Toronto, Mr. Ivan Počuch. He's accompanied today by Jerry Jelinek and Trade Commissioner David Müller. Thank you, all, for joining us at the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, there are several guests joining us today. We have school groups here, starting with the school group from Edmonton-Rutherford, students from George P. Nicholson. From Edmonton-Whitemud please welcome students from Monsignor William Irwin school. Last of our school groups today, from the constituency of Edmonton-South welcome students from Roberta MacAdams. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Hon. members, also in the Speaker's gallery this afternoon I'm very pleased to welcome the better half of the Member for Lethbridge-East, Ms Deanne Neudorf.

Also in the Speaker's gallery today are guests of mine. Welcome Mr. and Mrs. Peck – these are the parents of Samantha Peck, who works for the Associate Minister of Natural Gas – and also a son of constituents in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Welcome here today a guest of the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, Mr. Hamish McNaughton Kerfoot, a board member of Rocky View county FCSS program.

Visiting the Minister of Transportation: please welcome members of the Canadian Urban Transit Association.

Also, visiting the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction: a very warm welcome to Alberta Sugar Beet Growers and constituents joining him from Taber-Warner.

Also, special guests of the Minister of Seniors and Housing: from the city of Edmonton, Chief of Staff Aileen Giesbrecht and social development branch manager Jackie Foord.

Last but certainly not least, constituency guests of the Member for Edmonton-Glenora: please welcome Sylvia Krogh and Louise Swift.

Please rise, receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

Raging Grannies

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, thank you for acknowledging my guests: Sylvia Krogh, Louise Swift, and Edda Loomes. They are constituents and active participants in public life in the province of Alberta. They also happen to be Raging Grannies. This is their second trip to the Legislature in less than 10 days. Last Monday Sylvia, Louise, and Edda came here to take part in a demonstration against the government's cruel cuts to our postsecondary institutions.

For those of us not born into privilege and wealth, postsecondary education is a crucial doorway to a career and a better life, both for ourselves and for our families. But this government is slamming that door shut for many Albertans with a 23 per cent tuition fee hike, jacked-up interest on student debt, and cancellation of the tuition tax credits, just to pay for a $4.7 billion no-jobs corporate handout.

Sylvia, Louise, and Edda could have stayed home. They could have stayed warm. But they came here to support Alberta's young people and make those points using their constitutional rights of freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. After the event was concluded, Sylvia, Louise, and Edda, who are all seniors, were hoping for a moment to sit down, warm up a bit, have a cup of tea, and maybe use the bathroom. But when they came into the front doors of this House, the people's House, they were denied access and turned away. Imagine that, Mr. Speaker, tour groups being ushered in but engaged and publicly active citizens from Alberta turned away. This is disgraceful.

It is also very symbolic of this government, a government that has broken its promise to Albertans, a government whose attention is focused on rewarding its cronies and donors, a government that is dismantling and firing agencies and people who hold them to account. The Alberta public is the final check on this government. How quickly they are returning to the PC era of the front doors of this building being locked to keep the public out.

I hope that the presence of Sylvia, Louise, and Edda in the gallery today can help remind this corrupt government that Albertans will make them answer for their choices in this place.

Millar Western Forest Products Centennial

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, today I rise to acknowledge the incredible contributions of Millar Western within my region for the last 100 years. This summer I had the incredible honour, along with the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry and the Member for Central Peace-Notley, to participate in the 100-year celebrations of Millar Western. That day, as I am certain my colleagues will attest, I also showed off some pretty impressive axe-throwing skills at the celebration.

J.W. Millar incorporated his company, which was active in logging and construction, in 1919 in Saskatchewan and shortly afterwards was logging and sawmilling in Alberta. Mr. Millar chose to make Edmonton the home of the company's head office. In 1988 Millar Western pulp became Alberta's first bleached chemithermomechanical pulp, or BCTMP, mill.

You see, Mr. Speaker, while some may only recognize Millar Western as the company which supplies the 70-foot Christmas tree to Churchill Square each year, the contribution this company has made to my community is much, much larger. They employ hundreds of full-time and contract employees and contribute millions of dollars to our local economy. Millar Western leads the way in sustainable forest practices and environmental stewardship. They represent our province and country with their market access in the U.S., Asia, and Europe, yet here at home they ensure that our province and country are well represented by providing scholarships and training in trades to young people.

Three generations of the Millar family have been actively involved in the operations of Millar Western. Today Mac Millar and Janet Millar keep a watchful eye on the company, and I must say that they are truly incredible and genuine people.

Mr. Speaker, while I am here today to acknowledge Millar Western and the incredible milestone of 100 years, I trust, from what I have seen as I get to know them and with the forward thinking and leadership of Mr. Craig Armstrong, that Millar Western is indeed a young company as they will inevitably be here for generations to come.

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

Calgary Dinos' Vanier Cup Championship

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My wife loves it when I start talking football, so I know that every member of this House will be excited to hear about my great love for this game.

Mr. Speaker, the final game of the season. We had trained all year: 6 a.m. workouts, after-school practices, an entire summer dedicated to exercise. It's minus 10 outside, but you don't feel the cold. Adrenalin is keeping you warm. Your team, your brothers, are huddled up. Coach calls your number: blitz. You hover towards the line, then back. You keep 'em guessing. Ball is snapped. Go. You hid your blitz well. Unabated, clear path to that quarterback. I was the inside linebacker in a 3-4 scheme, and I loved it when the coach called my number.

Football is one of the great sports. Some may argue that hockey in Canada reigns supreme, but I would be happy to take on that debate. No matter your perspective it is fair to say that with 107 years of the Grey Cup, football is a big part of the Canadian identity.

That is why it is my pleasure to rise in this House today to congratulate the Calgary Dinos on their 27-13 victory over the Montreal Carabins. It has been 24 years since the Dinos hoisted the Vanier Cup back in 1995, with a close call in 2016, when they were edged out by Laval for the championship. Twenty-four years is a long time, but I'm sure any Blue Bombers fans in the House know the pain of a championship drought.

Through hard work and dedication, giving as good as they got, the Dinos showed Calgarians and Albertans that they were unstoppable. Their second touchdown a beautifully connected 10-play, 87-yard drive. Their quarterback, Adam Sinagra, and their head coach, Wayne Harris, led their team with distinction. When injuries took out defensive players, they soldiered on and claimed the Vanier Cup.

As an alumni of the University of Calgary I am very proud of the Dinos' win, and I would ask my colleagues to join me in congratulating the Dinos in their victory. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

1:40

Sports in Alberta

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak about my experience as a football mom, a hockey mom, a dance mom, a soccer mom, and in general a sports parent. All three of my children have been involved in sports growing up, and my youngest still plays hockey.

I've been at the early morning practices and now the late-night hockey games, freezing my feet and my buns off in the arena, cheering on my son. I'm such an enthusiastic and proud mom that, to my son's embarrassment, I have a blanket with his face on it that I showcase in my particularly proud moments.

I've also been involved in managing and coaching teams and know the level of commitment put in by parents, youngsters, and volunteers to foster a team atmosphere and a family dynamic amongst all the players and families. It's for this reason I want to thank the Northeast Zone Sports Council for continuing to foster their incredible work ethic that makes everyone feel like they are included and part of a larger family. This year marks their 50th anniversary in north Edmonton, and I want to congratulate them for being a stalwart in the community.

Opportunities to participate in sporting activities are vital for communities. This is why I am deeply concerned with the dissolution of the Alberta Sport Connection. I know the positive impact sports has on all who participate, and this decision is creating confusion and uncertainty for the community groups and organizations throughout the province as they work to ensure participation in sports for all. With this decision this government and the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women are once again sacrificing communities and families in order to pay for their $4.7 billion giveaway, and I will continue to call them out each and every time.

Thank you.

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

Aviation Industry

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As an airline alumni I proudly rise to speak to an important element of Alberta's economy and future. Air services are a vital asset in our transportation network as we develop comprehensive multimodal infrastructure to better serve all Albertans. Aviation is a key driver of global economic development. It is a proven stimulant with respect to tourism, commerce, investment, and trade. Time and again we see how strategically planned air services support employment, increase labour mobility, add value by enabling trade, and set the stage for building strong and impactful relationships across all sectors of the economy.

We all enjoy travel opportunities, but let's not forget the economic benefits also brought to Alberta. Strategic thinking and planning are required to launch and sustain air services as an enduring pillar of the Alberta advantage. Mr. Speaker, under the previous NDP government we saw indifference that may have contributed to the loss of vital air cargo links such as Cathay Pacific and Air China. These were important international air services which brought business to Alberta and export capacity to the world, now likely lost for the foreseeable future.

Air services, including the operations of our own provincial flag carrier, WestJet, provide many direct employment opportunities for Albertans, including but not limited to pilot training, aircraft maintenance, ground operations, and deep Arctic aviation such as the proven skills of Alberta's own Kenn Borek Air. This industry brings diversification and new opportunities and emerging markets to all Albertans while encouraging innovation and leading-edge technology investment in broader aerospace applications, including UAS and UAVs, commonly known as drones.

Mr. Speaker, I believe we need to recognize the vital importance of this industry and strategic attraction and retention of air services to ensuring that Alberta is well served now and into the future with respect to building the bridges of trade, tourism, investment, commerce, and friendship in an increasingly global economy. Our future depends upon it, and we can and will get it right under this UCP government.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has a statement to make.

Budget 2019 Petition

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past couple of weeks we've been talking to Albertans about this budget, and what we've heard is that people are disappointed, frustrated, and angry. My office has received hundreds of letters, and I've been meeting with more concerned citizens than ever before. They're concerned about the attack on Alberta's most vulnerable citizens, from deindexing AISH and destroying Henson trusts to increasing class sizes and eliminating 100 per cent of the urban indigenous programming in my former ministry.

People know that this budget is mean-spirited and will cause significant difficulties for years into the future. That is why over 10,000 Albertans signed our bad-budget petition and counting. They are angry that they are paying more and getting less, all so this government can give a $4.7 billion giveaway to the largest corporations, who then in turn are investing in Wisconsin and not here in Alberta. Calgary lost 1,000 jobs last week alone. This government is failing to create jobs and at the same time is asking families to pay more income tax, pay more to send their kids to school, pay more for seniors' drugs, and the list goes on.

I encourage all Albertans who watch my member's statement to head online, sign our petition, and join us in sending a message to this government about their terrible budget. I want to tell this Premier that Albertans are frustrated. He has broken countless campaign promises and made cuts that most would deem unthinkable. He's made postsecondary more difficult to attain and has threatened the well-being of patients who depend on biologics for inflammatory bowel disease. Just yesterday we watched as this government plowed ahead with cuts to supports for former foster kids even as reports of some of them dying as a result of suicide went public.

This budget is shameful. It's heartless. It's cruel. But we have tens of thousands of Albertans behind us, and as the numbers grow every day, together we will stand up to this government.

Energy Industry

Mr. Neudorf: Mr. Speaker, Albertans know the value of the oil and gas sector here in our province. We live in an ecosystem where we cannot ignore the ongoing impact of our energy industries. Some of our province's largest donors to youth programs, community initiatives, and arts and culture projects are the businesses and business owners that choose to invest in Alberta energy. We know that when our industry is strong, flexible, and fully allowed to innovate, we all reap and enjoy the benefits of industry's success. It is difficult to imagine an Alberta without Alberta energy, yet it seems that an Alberta without Alberta energy is the vision of our future that some of our neighbours are committed to.

To our neighbours in Quebec, who in one breath oppose Alberta resource development while wondering in another why they do not have a reliable source of propane in the face of a CN strike, I remind them that pipeline projects are the safest and most reliable way of getting energy across our country. As long as this country utilizes oil and gas, this energy should be from Alberta. Beyond that, it should be transported by pipeline projects that get our energy across our country and empower numerous communities along the way.

I agree that developing an answer to how we will fuel the future is a priority to all of us. Albertans are known for their resiliency and their comeback stories of success. Strong leadership and a vision for a better Canada of tomorrow require investments in renewable resources. This is not a question of if we will invest but a question of when and how we will invest. Management by crisis will not produce answers, and refusing to participate in Alberta-based pipeline projects across this country is not realistic, admirable, or saving anything. There is no solution to renewable resource development that doesn't come hand in hand with our current energy sector. That is why I am absolutely committed to supporting our platform promise of a TIER fund and supporting real, fact-based science. Technology and innovation have always moved us forward and will again while working with and in support of our Alberta oil and gas industry.

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

Alberta and Quebec

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Late last week Quebec's Finance minister, Eric Girard, published a column in the *Financial Post* which struck a conciliatory tone with western provinces. Girard wrote: "Québec is a partner of Western Canada and wants it to prosper. Québec supports Alberta's proposal that the federal government make the necessary improvements to the fiscal stabilization program." Girard said that his government is working to increase Quebec's GDP, which will eliminate the need for equalization, and notes that while the province will not accept an oil pipeline, they would be open to courting LNG development. This tone is refreshing to hear, but make no mistake, the political reality is muddy.

While Girard promises that Quebec's "government shares [our] concerns about the economic challenges [we] are facing, and the hardships experienced by families living [here]," just as loud is the absolute rejection of these same statements by Blanchet, who recently said that western separatism is inevitable because Canada is not a coherent or relevant country. When we have politicians attempting to soothe western worries while simultaneously their nationalist counterparts belittle and alienate us, questions are raised. We must ask ourselves: which of these two speaks for Quebec?

Girard offers a calming hand to the west. He assures us that our interests are interlinked and that the west's pain is felt by the provincial government of Quebec. Blanchet scoffs at these same statements and calls Canada itself a petrostate, seeming to suggest that the interests of the west supersede those of the east. As our government fights to have our voice heard in Confederation, Quebec will never help us achieve that goal. They seem to feel that Alberta has an extra seat at the federal table when out here we know that exactly the opposite is true.

Preliminary discussions between our Premier, our Energy minister, and their new federal counterparts have been promising and optimistic, but this all feels very familiar. Until we have shovels in the ground, Albertans will be hoping for the best while preparing for the worst.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50 Oral Question Period

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

Election Financing Legislation

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, as if it's not enough to breach the rule of law, abuse power, and likely breach the Conflicts of Interest Act, yesterday this government sent Justice lawyers to delay hearings into the Canadian Taxpayers Federation's challenge to laws designed to keep big money out of politics. These government lawyers promised the court that the law would be changed so that the CTF would no longer have a complaint. To the Premier: is there no end to your self-interested abuse of power to promote your own political success?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I guess the Leader of the Opposition didn't bother to read the platform upon which this government received a historic electoral mandate. It committed us to getting big money out of Alberta politics. NDP-affiliated unions spent millions of dollars trying to buy the last election. Thankfully, they failed. This is why we will keep our commitment to Albertans by bringing forward amendments to the election finance disclosure law to limit contributions to so-called political action committees to $30,000 a year.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, this is not about that particular transgression. This is about the gift to the CTF and others like it. The election finance laws were passed by this House to close loopholes that allowed foreign, corporate, or union money to influence elections. We put people first. Yet multiple third-party supporters of the UCP challenged these laws in court, and now it appears the Premier is going to fix the problem for them, the very people he used to work for, for heaven's sake. We took dark money out of politics. Why does the Premier want to put it back in?

Mr. Kenney: They did no such thing, Mr. Speaker. They created a legal structure that helped their union affiliates to spend millions of dollars trying to buy the last election. Albertans weren't buying it, though. Instead, they voted for a platform to finally get big money out of Alberta politics by limiting to $30,000 the amount of money that so-called PACs can receive. In addition, we're going to get the NDP's green left, foreign-funded interest groups out of our politics by banning them from contributing to political action committees in Alberta.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, the Premier doesn't appear to understand what it is I am talking about. Yesterday Justice lawyers told the court that the government is going to rewrite these laws, likely to the satisfaction of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation as well as other corporate, foreign-funded third parties supporting them. You know, this government claims to be fighting against foreign-funded interests, just apparently not the ones who support this Premier. Premier, why do you support foreign-funded interests that support only you?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, not only have they not read the platform, but they refuse to listen to the answer, which is that we will act for the first time in Alberta political history to make it illegal for foreign interests to interfere in our politics by contributing to the so-called political action committees that the NDP created in their legislation. There are other issues before the court dealing with the constitutionally protected freedom of expression. For example, we don't believe people should be prosecuted for publishing books, and we'll stand with Charter rights for freedom of expression.

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

Election Financing Legislation
Election Commissioner

Ms Notley: This Premier wants to stand up for the Charter rights of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, who he used to work for, but nobody else's. It's part of the same plan to unlevel the playing field, to pick winners and losers, to help his friends get him re-elected. It is outrageous, Mr. Speaker. Why is this Premier playing games, abusing his power to further his own political interest at the expense of Alberta voters?

Mr. Kenney: I think I get what's going on here, Mr. Speaker. They don't want us to limit their union buddies from spending millions of dollars in the campaign. They don't want us to stop the foreign-funded green left from interfering in our politics. They don't want us to stop the government from prosecuting people for publishing books. But we won't listen to the NDP. We'll listen to Albertans, and we'll keep our word.

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

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Premier tried to call the Election Commissioner's office redundant. Now experts are telling us that the separation of the commissioner from the CEO is actually a step forward because it guarantees investigations into misconduct involving election officials. So from a pure policy perspective, Bill 22 takes Alberta backwards. That's on top of the abuse of power perspective, the breach of rule of law perspective, the political interference perspective, the conflict-of-interest perspective, oh, and the corruption perspective. To the Premier: what in God's name are you trying to hide?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, some of Canada's leading experts on elections law have confirmed that it is inappropriate to have an Election Commissioner, who enforces the law, responsible to politicians. We are following their advice. In fact, Mr. Gibson himself, I believe in a report on the Northwest Territories, suggested that election commissioners should be integrated within the offices of chief electoral officers, which is why every other province in Canada and the federal Parliament have followed that approach. It's only the NDP who wanted a separate, redundant commissioner responsible to politicians instead of an arm's-length . . .

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

Ms Notley: Well, in fact, B.C.'s former Chief Electoral Officer said that we were truly ahead of the curve, and other experts say that probably the rest of the country is going to adopt the rules that this guy just got rid of. But you know what? The Premier fled the province and ducked the vote last week because he knows that this is a gross abuse of power. Political commentator Rob Breakenridge called it "one of the biggest acts of political cowardice in recent memory." Before the Premier is forced to change his party colours from blue to yellow, will he finally stand up and explain why he fired Mr. Gibson and Mr. Gibson specifically? Why the gag order? What is he scared of?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the real question for that failed former Premier is: why was she the only Premier in Canada to create a separate, redundant election bureaucracy that was answerable to politicians and not to the Chief Electoral Officer? Why was she mucking around with Alberta election law in this way? This government has kept its word with Albertans. We opposed this unnecessary, duplicate, redundant bureaucracy in opposition. That opposition has been expressed in Bill 22. We've kept our commitment to Albertans.

The Speaker: Hon. members, be cautious with the allegations that you might make either during debate or outside of debate.

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Ms Notley: You know, Mr. Speaker, I know the Premier is intimidated by experts, but he really should consult one or two of them.

Calgary Finances

Ms Notley: Nonetheless, this Premier's $4.7 billion corporate handout is hurting Albertans. Last night hundreds of Calgarians showed up to a town hall to hear how the Premier's cuts to the city will impact families. Low-income transit passes: gone. Mary Salvani is on AISH, which this Premier also cut, and relies on that pass to get groceries and visit the doctor. She said, quote: I feel like everything is coming up against me. To the Premier: are these the kinds of efficiencies that the Premier promised to find in Calgary, and why is he most focused on attacking the most vulnerable?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, what the Leader of the Opposition said is, as is so often and sadly the case, completely wrong. In fact, the budget renewed the low-income transit pass. Why? Because of the general approach of this budget to prioritize support for the vulnerable. Even in the midst of a fiscal crisis created by the NDP, we are increasing significantly the budgets for Community and Social Services, Children's Services as well as for mental health and addictions. [interjections] Now they're so angry that they can't stop heckling.

Ms Hoffman: We are angry.

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora will come to order.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier created this problem by cutting funding to Calgary halfway through the year. Now, Poverty Talks! says that the cuts will mean fewer affordable housing units at a time when the province – read you guys – is also cutting rent supplements. Quote: it's going to mean a lot of evictions, and it is catastrophic to the whole system. Evictions at Christmas, in the middle of winter. Premier, why are you making those with the very least pay the very most to cover your $4.7 billion handout to big, profitable corporations?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the NDP created, in the words of former NDP Finance minister Dr. MacKinnon, a fiscal crisis, a track towards over a hundred billion dollars in debt, which would have us spending billions and billions on interest payments to bankers instead of social services. This government has a credible plan to stop that fiscal disaster while protecting the most vulnerable in a budget that actually increases funding for Community and Social Services by 7.6 per cent and for Children's Services by over 8 per cent. We got it done.

2:00

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the choice this Premier's cuts are forcing on Calgary is simple: raise taxes or cut jobs. Now, I'll assume the Premier doesn't want higher property taxes and would rather see more people fired. That's kind of been his shtick so far. So, Premier, help Calgary decide. Who should they fire first: police officers, firefighters, EMTs, bus drivers, or snowplow drivers? Those are the top contenders at last night's meeting. That's the decision. Premier, your cuts are doing this. Help them decide who gets fired this Christmas.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I guess four years in government did not mitigate the NDP's total fiscal and economic illiteracy. Here are the real questions. How would they stop a reckless dive into over a hundred billion dollars in debt? Would it be just borrowing more and paying more in interest, or would it be raising taxes? Why doesn't she just come clean and admit that what the NDP really wants is to impose a sales tax on Albertans, and if that's not true, when are they going to finally come forward with their so-called shadow budget? It's so far in the shadows that we can't even see it.

The Speaker: Hon. members, a point of order is noted at 2:01 on behalf of the official . . . [interjections] Order. [interjections] Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora is the only one with the call.

Calgary Board of Education Layoffs

Ms Hoffman: Yesterday I met with some of the 300 Calgary public teachers who are losing their jobs as a result of this UCP budget and this Education minister's incompetence. One teacher I met with has been teaching for 32 years. She specializes in working with vulnerable children who are struggling with their mental health. Her school hired her because of the classroom improvement fund. This minister cut that funding, and now those kids are going to lose this crucial support. There are reports that more than 200 students have walked out of Calgary classrooms today because they are protesting this government's budget, so to the Premier: why did he choose a $4.7 billion no-jobs corporate handout over the well-being of children living in Calgary?

The Speaker: The hon. the Education minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I really do sympathize with the teachers and the families and the children that are involved here. But, at the end of the day, this was a decision that the CBE made. They chose to end the contracts of 300 of their teachers, of the most important people next to the students themselves. They are responsible for this decision. They did not reach out to our department to help them in this process, and ultimately they have the responsibility of this decision.

Ms Hoffman: Another teacher I met yesterday in Calgary was the spouse of an active duty member of the Canadian Forces. When this member was deployed to the Calgary area, the whole family moved there. This teacher got a temporary contract with the Calgary board of education. But this minister cut more than $30 million out of Calgary public's budget, and now this teacher is out of a job. To the Premier: why is he pushing hardship and unemployment onto a military family who are already facing and sacrificing so much for our country? Why would he make this woman sacrifice her job as well?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. The school board, the CBE, actually has a budget of $1.2 billion. It's an operating budget serving 130,000 students. The city of Calgary has an operating budget of $3.5 billion. They have an operating budget a third of that of the whole city. I do call them to account because instead of prioritizing the students and the teachers in the classroom, they chose to cut the teachers, who are one of the most important people next to the students themselves. They are responsible for this decision.

Ms Hoffman: The minister is the one who cut more than $30 million from Calgary public's budget, and she won't even take responsibility for that decision. She created the conditions that have resulted in this.

Another teacher I met yesterday is married to somebody who worked in oil and gas. He recently was laid off. The $4.7 billion corporate handout didn't save his job. [interjections] And the members opposite are laughing. Now his wife, a teacher, is laid off from Calgary public schools. Just like that, both incomes gone. This household has faced such brutal cuts, that Education and a massive corporate giveaway have only made worse. To the Premier: the Calgary families have . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. We've seen over the years, obviously, a pattern of mismanagement by this board, so that is why I'm calling an independent financial audit and a governance review. What I see happening is the CBE using our children and our teachers as political footballs. The Grey

Cup is over. They need to stop playing political football with our children. [interjections]

Thank you.

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

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

Energy Project Regulatory Reviews

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On September 6 the Energy minister launched, quote, a thoughtful and thorough evaluation of the Alberta Energy Regulator in order to maintain the high standards that have made Alberta a global oil and gas leader. Unquote. In the past few years the red tape in project approval has threatened to eat away at the Alberta advantage. We had reached a point where it took twice as long to get projects approved in Alberta than it did in Saskatchewan. Can the minister update the House on what progress is now being made to lower the differential of approval times between Alberta and our peer competitors?

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

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're committed to improving investor confidence in this province, and that includes having a regulatory process that attracts investment. That's why we launched a review of the Alberta Energy Regulator. We're looking at the governance, the mandate, and the operations within the AER. We're looking to find out why the process became so bogged down over the last four years. We're looking for transformative change and for continuous improvement. At the same time we're also cutting red tape. All of this to return and attract investment to this province.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta's oil and gas industry faces many challenges, including the uncertainty now created by the passage of federal Bill C-69 and the creation of a new Impact Assessment Agency, and given this government's commitment to champion new oil and gas projects within Alberta and reduce red tape for the new approvals to restore Alberta's competitive advantage, can the minister please answer how Bill C-69 could potentially introduce even more uncertainty for Alberta's approval process?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is a lot wrong with Bill C-69. Our Alberta Energy Regulator review is meant to find efficiencies and efficient process to attract investment, but Bill C-69 does the absolute opposite. It creates lengthy, costly reviews with unlimited public participation. It creates a polarizing process where public policy is debated. It's lengthy. It's an uncertain process with political interference. It's also unconstitutional – it reviews projects in our exclusive jurisdiction – and that's why we've launched our constitutional challenge.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. I'm glad to hear there's hope on the horizon for Alberta's oil and gas producers.

Given that the review of the AER is ongoing, can the minister please answer how the government of Alberta will continue to reform this regulator and bring its activities back in line with the needs of industry, Albertans, and reality to reduce red tape, get Albertans back to work, and shorten and streamline the regulatory process?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The review of the AER will be completed shortly. As I said before, we're looking for transformative change. We've also replaced the board of directors of the AER, and they're in the process of hiring a new CEO. We're cutting red tape, and we're implementing the recommendations of three independent parliamentary oversights, including the Auditor General, that found serious mismanagement of funds, conflicts of interest between 2015 and 2018 at the AER. We're reviewing this to make sure that type of stuff never happens again.

Government Alcohol Purchase Contract

Ms Goehring: In the past six months the Ministry of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women has purchased more than $35,000 worth of alcohol from a company named Prestige Liquor. That's the first bulk purchase of alcohol by the government of Alberta for at least five years. Can the minister tell the House what the purpose of this purchase was?

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

Mrs. Aheer: Actually, Mr. Speaker – and thank you for the question – no. I have absolutely no clue, and I'm happy to get back to the member once I figure out what that is all about.

Thank you.

2:10

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Minister. Given that the government already has a track record of corrupt procurement and no-bid contracts for supporters, cronies, and family members and given that Prestige Liquor has only been in business for just over a year and has never done any business with the government of Alberta before this Premier was elected, can the minister say why Prestige Liquor was selected as the sole supplier of alcohol for her ministry?

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. We continue to see the NDP play fear-and-smear games inside this Legislature. The minister has already said that they'll get back to the hon. member in regard to that specific issue. The real question is: when the NDP were in power, why were they giving contracts to antipipeline and anti-oil and gas friends? Tzeporah Berman is a perfect example. [interjections] That former government, that Leader of the Opposition, when she was Premier, put Ms Berman in charge of a committee in charge of reviewing the oil sands even though she was dedicated to destroying the energy industry. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. [interjections] Order. Order. It's important for all members of the Assembly to be able to hear the answer.

Ms Goehring: Given that the owner of Prestige Liquor, Mr. Keshav Pareek, is a long-time Conservative donor dating back to 2004 and given that Mr. Pareek had donated $4,250 to the Premier's 2017 PC leadership campaign, isn't it true, Minister, that Prestige Liquor got a corrupt contract to sell the government more than $35,000 worth of alcohol because of their partisan support and personal friendship with the Premier?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, as the minister said, they'd be happy to get back to the member specifically on that issue. But there the NDP go again jumping the shark. Let me ask them a question I already asked them before. Did Tzeporah Berman get the contract to help shut down the Alberta oil and gas industry because she was friends with the NDP? [interjections] Was that corrupt? I don't know. I certainly know my constituents thought it was pretty corrupt that the NDP, when they were in government, hired somebody to be in charge of the oil sands who was dedicated to destroying the oil and gas industry. That's the legacy of the Leader of the Opposition and her party. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The Member for St. Albert has the call.

Henson Trusts for Persons with Disabilities

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I was joined by Albertans concerned about further attacks by this government to the AISH program in Bill 21. Our government, I'm sure you'll remember, passed legislation to establish Henson trusts in 2018. The change gave disabled people the ability to manage money they might receive as a financial gift or an inheritance by placing it in an exempt asset like a registered disability savings plan or trust fund without risking their eligibility to AISH. Now those trusts are gone. To the minister: what could possibly be your reason for this change? Is it to kick more people off AISH so you can pay for the massive $4.7 billion . . .

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

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, I want to be absolutely clear that Bill 21 does not change how the AISH program treats trusts, including Henson trusts. Albertans can continue to place assets into these trusts for their loved ones without it impacting their benefits in any way. Again, to reiterate, there has been no change to Henson trusts.

Ms Renaud: Given that we understand how this works – Bill 21 moves eligibility criteria for AISH from legislation to regulation, allowing the minister to change it at will – and given that this UCP can't be trusted to support AISH and given that they didn't campaign on cutting AISH and given that cutting the cost of living is a cut, will you admit that you're changing eligibility criteria so you can make further cuts going forward without consultation, or internally consulted, as the minister likes to say?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, we have not made any cuts to the AISH program. I've said this many times in this House, and I'm going to say it again. That's absolutely incorrect, and perpetuating the same narrative just creates unnecessary fear in the disability community. In terms of why these provisions were moved from the act into regulations: it's consistent with how the income support program works, and it's consistent with the PDD program as well.

Ms Renaud: Given that I was joined today by the parent of a disabled Albertan – her name is Christie – and given that Christie said, and I quote, as a family we're working very hard towards our child's independence, and if something happened either to my husband or myself, I know tomorrow I want to rest assured that neither of our children nor their guardians and trustees will struggle, unquote, and given that ending Henson trusts throws Christie's plans into disarray, to the minister: what do you say to her? Drop the rhetoric. Put away the notes. Answer the questions. You might not call it a cut, but you have done something very negative and very harmful. Just answer the question.

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, I have answered the question, but I'll answer it again. To this individual that the member opposite is speaking about, through you to her directly: we have not changed Henson trusts. They are intact, and they will remain intact. Certainly, if the member has any questions about this, I mean, she can feel free to contact me directly for some more clarity. I have stated many times that there is no change to these trusts.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain has a question.

Stony Plain Central School Replacement Project

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Stony Plain Central school is an incredible middle school in my riding, and it does a fantastic job of delivering high-quality service despite the fact that the school is extremely overcrowded. Plans for a new replacement school have been in the works for years. The replacement school would offer vastly increased capacity and better facilities for students and is desperately needed in the riding to address the growing population in the community of Stony Plain. To the Minister of Education: is this project continuing under this government?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question, and thank you, hon. member. The Stony Plain Central K to 9 replacement school project was approved in 2018 and is currently in the design phase. Budget 2019 included $1.4 billion over four years to continue work on previously announced school projects across Alberta, including this one. Alberta Infrastructure is expecting a schematic design report to be completed in early December.

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

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for her answer. Given the importance of the reconstruction of Stony Plain Central to the education of middle school aged children in my riding and given that my constituents have already been forced to wait for a long time for this critical need to be addressed and given the delays my riding has seen under the previous government in getting school projects completed and completed well, can your ministry illustrate to us a timeline of when the new school in Stony Plain can expect to be receiving students for the very first time?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. The timeline for the completion of this project will be determined once it's gone to tender. At that time, the construction schedule will be developed and an estimated completion date will be made public. We'll be able to get back to you with those dates as soon as possible.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the importance of this project to my riding and given the fears raised by poor execution of previous projects, in particular the failure to plan for or fund a playground at Prescott school in Spruce Grove, and given the hoops that families of Prescott students have had to go through just to find funding for a playground, which they still haven't received, and given the importance of playgrounds to a school environment for

encouraging outside play, can the minister commit to ensuring that important equipment like a playground is funded?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and hon. member, for the question. As part of Budget 2019 our government has announced that funding to help build playgrounds will continue to be provided to new school projects with K to 6 programming. Moving forward, new schools will have playground funding included in their project budgets. This removes funding from a separate pot and puts it into the overall project. No longer will parents have to fund raise for hundreds of thousands of dollars to build playgrounds, which are as essential as any gymnasium.

Thank you.

Bill 22 and Public Service Pension Changes

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, we all continue to be inundated with letters and calls from workers who are horrified at this government's plans to take political control over their pensions. The Minister of Finance should clearly know at this point that Alberta teachers do not trust his plan to move their pensions to AIMCo. I'm asking this minister to make a promise to these folks today. To the minister: can you promise here and now that you will never ever politically direct AIMCo how to manage Albertans' pension funds?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question. I appreciate the opportunity to clear up a lot of misinformation on ATRF pension investment management moving to AIMCo. ATRF will continue to provide high-level strategic direction and investment policy over their pension assets. ATRF will continue to manage the pension plan. AIMCo operates at arm's length from this government. We're confident that AIMCo will deliver excellent results on behalf of Alberta teachers and taxpayers.

2:20

Ms Gray: Given that with the corrupt Bill 22 this government has also moved to weaken the pension protections for part-time workers and given that this government jammed Bill 22 through the House in a matter of days, before many hard-working Albertans even knew that their rights had been stripped away, to the Minister of Finance: can you please inform this House how much the government is saving by stripping away pension protections for part-time workers, or is that something that you hoped workers wouldn't notice?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, Bill 22 strengthens public-sector pensions on behalf of Alberta workers. We've made changes to improve and strengthen the governance of pension plans to ensure that we have the competency and skill sets required. We are confident that our world-class asset manager AIMCo will deliver high-quality results for Alberta public-sector workers and ensure that we receive maximum returns on behalf of Alberta taxpayers.

Ms Gray: Given that the minister can't seem to bring himself to talk about part-time workers and the implications in Bill 22 that impact them and given that I've searched the UCP platform from front to back and found no word of these pension changes and given that there are massive concerns, indicated by rallies and 30,000 letters that have come to MLAs, to the minister: will you undo your pension changes, commit to more consultation, promise you won't politically interfere, or finally tell this House what your real plan for pensions is?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, with respect to ATRF asset management, teachers' pension assets going to AIMCo, that will result in $41 million of savings as the large asset balance that AIMCo manages drives down the costs of managing those assets, $41 million in savings, which will improve, in fact lower, the contribution rates for Alberta teachers and move $20 million into the classrooms as we as an employer save premiums.

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

Health Consultation Nondisclosure Agreements

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, last week the minister adamantly denied that he'd asked a physician to sign a nondisclosure agreement, or NDA, before he'd share vital information about changes to medications used to treat Crohn's and colitis. He even took to Twitter to defame Dr. Panaccione by accusing him of lying about having been asked. Today I'll be tabling copies of that NDA. I'll ask the minister again: why would you ask a physician to sign an NDA before you would share information about your plans to make significant changes to how he can care for his patients?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to rise again in this House and again talk about nondisclosure agreements that stakeholders might be asked, if they're asking for a ministry to provide confidential information – as I said last week, I did not ask a physician to sign a nondisclosure agreement. At the end of the meeting I was asked by that physician why the ministry is asking for NDAs if a stakeholder is asking for confidential information. Well, let's answer that through three questions. Has the Ministry of Health used NDAs in the past, including under previous governments, including under Edmonton-Glenora? Yes.

Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I'll answer the rest later on.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, given that Dr. Panaccione rightly refused the NDA as it would leave him unable to advise his patients about changes that could drastically impact their health and given that he left the meeting feeling handcuffed and unable to practise the best medicine possible, to the same minister: is the real reason you wanted that NDA because you know that both patients and doctors would resist your plans to interfere in their medical decisions and gamble with their health and their quality of life just to save a buck?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, as I was saying previously, has the Ministry of Health used NDAs before? Yes. Do other ministries use NDAs sometimes when a stakeholder is asking for confidential information? Yes. Have other provinces used NDAs in the consultations regarding biosimilar consultations? Yes, B.C. and Ontario. The manufacturer, or the originator, that's upset about these NDAs: that originator manufacturer actually has executed the NDAs in those two other jurisdictions, B.C. and Ontario. This is about the ministry providing confidential information to these stakeholders.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, given that this minister has broken trust with medical doctors, nurses, health care aides, lab technicians, and now gastroenterologists and thousands of Albertans living with Crohn's and colitis and given that his and his staff's bumbling of this file has now prompted a protest at this

Legislature by patients asking this government to take them as seriously as the corporations benefiting from their $4.7 billion handout, to this minister: will you end your government's practice of blindsiding Albertans with life-altering changes without consultation and commit to never asking another stakeholder to sign an NDA?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, again, I have not asked anybody to sign an NDA. Anybody who wants to meet with me does not have to sign an NDA. Anyone who wants to speak with me does not have to sign an NDA. I will never ask anyone to sign an NDA to speak with me, to give me their feedback. I said that last week, and I'm going to say it again. Nobody has to sign an NDA to speak with me, to meet with me or meet with the ministry.

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

Choice in Education

Ms Glasgo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is committed to ensuring that Alberta students receive a high-quality education regardless of which school system they choose, whether that be public, separate, francophone, charter, private, or even home-schooling. Alberta Education recently launched a survey to collect feedback from Albertans regarding school choice in our province. Some Albertans have expressed concern that choice in education would mean that different systems provide different education. To the Minister of Education: how does Alberta Education ensure that education continues across the board?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and hon. member. Alberta has a long and successful tradition of supporting school choice, and our government is committed to preserving, protecting educational choice. Choice does not mean differing qualities of education. Rather, it provides parents with the opportunity to choose the type of education that best fits their unique situations and their needs. Regardless of the educational path a parent chooses for their child, Albertans can be assured that their students will receive a world-class, high-quality education.

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

Ms Glasgo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for her answer. Given that our province has a long history of supporting school choice and given that many loving Alberta parents are passionate about their children's education and given that the previous government would not divulge the names of all who contributed to the recent curriculum rewrite even when outright asked to do so by the opposition of the day, to the same minister: who is the government interested in hearing from with regard to the choice in education survey?

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We want to hear from every Albertan. Every single Albertan has a unique perspective on educational choice, and we want to hear from them on what opportunities they believe can help protect, improve, and enhance education choice in Alberta. The feedback gathered will be used to inform the development of the choice in education act, and I encourage everyone to fill out the survey that is online at alberta.ca.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Glasgo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that the universal declaration of human rights states that parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that their child shall be given and given that the previous government placed school choice under attack and took an adversarial approach to loving parents, to the same minister: how will this government ensure that parents have a strong voice in their child's education? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. The hon. minister has the call.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and hon. member, for the questions. We were elected with a very clear mandate to bring forward a choice in education act which will reaffirm and make firm that parents have the primary responsibility for the education of their children. We have a long and rich history of school choice to celebrate in this province, in fact, over 170 years. Our platform was very crystal clear. We will protect and preserve educational choice in Alberta. Parents can be confident that their role in their child's education will be protected by this government. Promise made, promise kept.

Environmental Policies

Mr. Schmidt: A recent report from the United Nations environment program states that if drastic action isn't taken, our planet will be heading towards warming of 3.2 degrees Celsius in our kids' lifetimes. This report, compiled by many leading scientists from institutions around the world, makes it clear that urgent action is necessary. Can the Minister of Environment and Parks tell this House what additional steps he'll take to reduce emissions and combat climate change, or does he think that dusting off and renaming the PC's old plan is good enough?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Environment and Parks.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are quite happy with the TIER program that we've introduced inside Alberta. We're partnering with our largest emitters inside this province and working on 55 per cent of our GHG emissions inside the province right now with concrete action, working on technology and innovation, and actually moving forward on the file, unlike what the previous government did and that member did when they were in power, which was to tax hard-working Alberta families at the very time that they needed their government to stand with them, with no environmental gain. All economic pain, no environmental gain. Alberta voted for a different approach. We followed through on that promise, and I'm proud to say: promise made, promise kept.

2:30

Mr. Schmidt: Well, given that the minister has dealt significant economic pain to this province by slashing renewables and the energy efficiency industries in favour of a $4.7 billion corporate handout and given that the UN report states that renewables and energy efficiency are one of the key measures to effectively reduce emissions, can the minister of environment state what steps he will be taking to rebuild the thriving renewables sector devastated by his policies and actions?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, it's disappointing to see the NDP continue to misrepresent the job-creation tax cut, which actually is only $100 million in cost, not four point whatever billion dollars. [interjection] What you see with that hon. member and the party across the way, that is heckling me right now during the answer, is that they don't want to stand with job creators.

They don't want to stand with our largest industry while tackling this problem because they, like their federal party, are committed to stopping the energy industry. Our party campaigned on a different approach. Albertans voted for it in overwhelming numbers when they fired that party, and we're proud to have brought it into place.

Mr. Schmidt: Given, Mr. Speaker, that our party is not in the pocket of big corporations like the members opposite and given that the United Nations report states that the world is seriously behind when it comes to reducing emissions and given that the report also states that in order to address this crisis, efforts to cut emissions will need to be tripled, will the Minister of Environment and Parks tell this House what steps he's considering to further reduce emissions? Or is the so-called TIER program all that we get?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, that hon. member is right. Albertans know for sure that they did not stand with job creators. In fact, they stood with the green left, the foreign-influenced green left, who is dedicated to shutting down our energy industry. While that member was in government, just a few short months ago, he went out of his way to be able to support his federal leader and those types of organizations, who then caused devastation to our province, record job losses, record deficits, record debt, and caused over $50 billion in investment to flee this province. That hon. member and his former government failed this province. We will not.

Government Photography Contract

Ms Phillips: Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, I asked the Finance minister why his department handed a $73,000, no-bid government contract to Vek Labs, which is a partisan UCP ad firm. The minister didn't seem to be much aware of the corruption in his own department, but a spokesperson later told media that they were pressed for time during transition and had to pick someone quickly. The trouble is that the contract didn't start until July, two months after the cabinet was sworn in, so that wasn't true. Let's give the minister another chance to explain away patronage and self-dealing. Why did the Premier's partisan friends get a lucrative government contract from this Minister of Finance without bidding for it?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, this contract was awarded at a time when there was high demand internally for the services, for these types of services. The rates being proposed by the vendor were analyzed to ensure that they were competitive with other suppliers for the same product. One thing: we will not be lectured about economic matters by the members across the House. They had this province on a trajectory to economic failure. We will turn this province around and deliver a balanced budget. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. It's important that all members can hear the answer as well as the question.

Ms Phillips: Given that this Minister of Finance's debt is the same as the previous government's debt, given that the legal exemption clause that this minister used to justify this corrupt contract was not urgency – it was that only one vendor could provide this service – and given that there are obviously many professional photographers and videographers in Alberta, isn't it true that Vek Labs got this contract because they are buddies with the Premier and shot a hometown hero flick for him during the last provincial election campaign? That's what this is about.

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, the opposition continues to create fear amongst Albertans, unfounded fear. Again, we will not be lectured by the members across the House. We've inherited a fiscal mess left by the previous government, which includes uncontrolled spending at a time when revenues remained flat. We are managing this province's finances responsibly. We've delivered a four-year fiscal plan that will lead us to balance. We're delivering for Albertans. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. [interjections] Order. The Official Opposition has plenty of time to share their opinion, and it's only when they are standing.

Ms Phillips: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that someone has to lecture this government about corruption because, clearly, the minister is not listening and given that this minister's spokesman said, "We needed somebody who the Premier's office was comfortable with, so we asked them, which is how we came up with that supplier," and given that that's about as clear a confession of corrupt procurement as you will ever hear, why did this Minister of Finance abandon his ethical and professional standards and sign off on the Premier's friends getting a no-bid government contract?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, Albertans elected this government to bring this province back to fiscal responsibility. The members opposite had us on a trajectory of continued job losses and the flight of investment capital by the tens of billions. We are changing that trajectory. We've created a competitive business environment that will attract investment, create jobs, and bring this province to fiscal balance.

Natural Gas Industry

Mr. Walker: Mr. Speaker, Canadian natural gas is produced under a world-class regulatory system. It is being used throughout the world to reduce global emissions. The world needs more natural gas from Canada and, in particular, from Alberta. Estimates show that in the next five years global demand for natural gas will increase by more than 10 per cent. To the Associate Minister of Natural Gas. Alberta is a major supplier of clean and reliable LNG. Can you please share what the level of interest is from Japan and South Korea to purchase our natural gas?

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Natural Gas.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. I'm pleased to share that there's a renewed sense of optimism regarding natural gas in Korea and Japan. Now, it's no secret that the NDP spent four years stifling free enterprise and innovation, and it didn't go unnoticed by the international community. They damaged our brand, but I'm happy to report that our message of natural gas and Alberta being a destination for clean, secure, ethically sourced natural gas landed well with investors.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that on your mission to Asia you met with government and senior leaders across the energy industry to promote Alberta's clean, secure, and ethically sourced natural gas and given that part of your mandate is to get more Alberta natural gas to Asian markets through LNG projects, can the associate minister please share, from his perspective, what potential opportunities were discussed that could get Alberta natural gas to overseas markets and get Albertans back to work?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to visit two of Asia's largest LNG importers, and this is critical because we have to find

markets and destinations for LNG off the west coast. But we didn't just go to Asia for LNG. I'm pleased to report that we had a number of great conversations with pet-chem companies, petrochemical companies that didn't even have Alberta on the map, and now they're looking at us as a serious destination for petrochemical facilities.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the former NDP government drove much-needed foreign investment away from our province and given that this government was elected on an overwhelming mandate to bring investment back into this province and given that this government recently announced its commitment to continuing with the petrochemical diversification program, which is so important in my riding of Sherwood Park, can the associate minister please tell the House how the companies he met with responded to bringing their investment dollars back here in this province of Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Natural Gas.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After four years of the NDP damaging the Alberta brand and chasing investment away from the province, we had to send a message that Alberta's experiment with socialism is over. We are now open for business. Our message of being a destination for secure, clean, ethically sourced natural gas is landing on strong ears.

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

2:40 Driver's Licence Road Tests

Ms Goodridge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Getting your driver's licence is a rite of passage in rural Alberta. It signifies maturity and responsibility given the importance of road safety. For many years Alberta had a system that was envied. Our system placed safety as the priority while ensuring a low-cost, efficient system for driver certification. Now we have a system that is envied by no one, and my office is flooded by complaints. To the Minister of Transportation: what is the government doing to clean up this mess?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker and to the hon. member for the question. The hon. member is right. Since the public takeover in March 2019 road test times have skyrocketed to 12 weeks' waiting time. This is unacceptable. Our government has taken action since day one. We've authorized overtime and weekends. We've added more government employee examiners. We've licensed examiners from outside of government to help us catch up, and we have returned the class 5 basic test to 30 minutes from 45, which will allow us to do thousands more tests per month.

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

Ms Goodridge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for the response. The public is furious about the current state of driver certification. Given the correspondence I've received in my office about the impact that these changes have had on potential drivers getting their first licence and given the impact to our economy by delayed driver certification, can the minister tell us how the government plans to fix this system in the long term?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll say to the hon. member that my phone rings off the hook every day with Albertans concerned about this. Last week we announced the beginning of a public review of the driver examination system. We will be engaging Albertans and key stakeholders, including driver examiners and registry agents and Albertans, about road tests. We are going to take action to reduce wait times to make sure that Albertans get the level of service that they expect and that they deserve because it hasn't been acceptable.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Goodridge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. It's shocking how badly the system is performing. Given how well the previous system served Albertans by ensuring safe drivers on the road while maintaining a low-cost, efficient system before being blown up by the previous government and given how awful the current system is serving Alberta drivers and job creators, why did the NDP make such a disastrous change?

Mr. McIver: Well, I don't know that I can answer for what the NDP was thinking, but the hon. member is right. They absolutely blew up the system on March 1 of this year during the beginning of the busiest time of the year for driver examiners. They cut the number of driver examiners to less than half. Mr. Speaker, if hon. members want to know whom to blame, they only need to look across the aisle, as Albertans do. But we're cleaning it up. We're adding driver examiners. We are looking at how we can increase the system more. Again, we've added thousands more tests each month in one step, by simply changing some of the tests from 45 minutes apart to 30. But we're not done; we won't be done until there's an acceptable wait time.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I might just provide a little bit of caution. All private members will know that questions that they ask should be about government business. What a previous government did or didn't do may not in fact constitute government business.

In 30 seconds or less we will proceed to Members' Statements.

Members' Statements
(continued)

Support for the Energy Industry

Mr. Schow: This past Sunday 3.9 million people tuned in to RDS and TSN to watch the Winnipeg Blue Bombers thump the Hamilton Tiger-Cats in the 107th Grey Cup. It was a convincing win that ended Winnipeg's championship drought, which my friend tells me lasted 10,535 days. But who's counting? That is a long time, though.

While thousands took to the streets to celebrate the win, others took to social media. For what, you ask? A hoodie, specifically the Premier's hoodie, worn at centre field for the coin toss, that said on it: I heart Canadian oil and gas. How absurd, how pathetic. To the Twitter trolls: shame on you. Go find a hobby.

It's clear as day that the world needs more energy. World-class, ethical oil and gas is the pride of Alberta and the economic engine of Canada. It is highly ethical, innovative, and life-changing work. As someone who worked on a drilling rig, I am fiercely proud of our energy sector and all the good it does. Its prosperity affords so many things that we value while creating hundreds of thousands of jobs and billions in economic activity.

Sadly, the pride I have for our energy sector isn't shared by all, not by people who dump their raw sewage into the rivers, lakes, and oceans or those who happily receive billions in transfer payments

made possible by our oil and gas, and it's also not shared by those who'd rather import their oil and gas from countries with appalling human rights records.

Our oil and gas sector needs hope. Blocked by our own federal government, we can't get pipelines built even when parts of our country can't fire up a barbecue. If the public and the media spent more time promoting our oil and gas sector and less time dumping on it, we might actually find some public support across this province and shovels in the ground.

To our Premier, thank you for making the most of every opportunity to stand for our ethical energy sector and for saying what needs to be said over and over and over: I love Canadian oil and gas.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

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

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First off, as chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills I'm pleased to table the committee's final report on Bill 205. That's the Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Presumed Consent) Amendment Act, 2019, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-South East. This bill was referred to the committee on November 6, 2019.

The committee's final report recommends that Bill 205 proceed. I request concurrence of the Assembly in the final report on Bill 205.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the motion of concurrence in a report is debatable pursuant to Standing Order 18(1)(b). Are there any members who wish to speak to the motion for concurrence?

Seeing none, the chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills has requested concurrence in the report on Bill 205, Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Presumed Consent) Amendment Act, 2019.

[Motion for concurrence carried]

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

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much again, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills I'm also pleased to table the committee's final report on Bill 207, Conscience Rights (Health Care Providers) Protection Act, sponsored by the hon. Member for Peace River. This bill was referred to the committee on November 7, 2019.

The committee's final report recommends that Bill 207 not proceed. I request concurrence of the Assembly in the final report on Bill 207.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the motion for concurrence in the report is debatable pursuant to Standing Order 18(1)(b). Are there any members who wish to speak to the motion for concurrence? Please rise. Hon. members, seeing that there are members who wish to speak to the motion for concurrence in the report, that debate will take place on the next available Monday under the item of business Motions for Concurrence in Committee Reports on Public Bills Other than Government Bills.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Minister of Environment and Parks and the Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to provide oral notice of Bill 29, Municipal Government (Machinery and Equipment Tax Incentives) Amendment Act, 2019, sponsored by the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Ellis: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices, in accordance with section 4(7) of the Election Act and section 4(2) of the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act I'm pleased to table the following report, A Report of the Chief Electoral Officer: Annual Report 2018-19.

Thank you, sir.

The Speaker: Are there others wishing to table documents? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the appropriate number of copies of a document entitled Climate-heating Greenhouse Gases Hit New High, UN Reports.

I also have a document I'd like to table on behalf of the Member for St. Albert that's titled Climate Change: Greenland's Ice Faces Melting "Death Sentence."

2:50

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of hon. Mr. Toews, President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance, pursuant to the Conflicts of Interest Act and the Legislative Assembly Act the Report of Selected Payments to the Members and Former Members of the Legislative Assembly and Persons Directly Associated with Members of the Legislative Assembly for the year ended March 31, 2019.

On behalf of hon. Mr. Wilson, Minister of Indigenous Relations, responses to questions raised by Mr. Feehan, hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, and Ms Phillips, hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, on November 5, 2019, Ministry of Indigenous Relations 2019-20 main estimates debate.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at points of order, and at 2:01 the Official Opposition House Leader raised one.

Point of Order
False Allegations

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise on 23(h), (i), (j). At approximately 2:01 the Premier accused the opposition, the Alberta NDP, of wanting to introduce a PST. Now, again, this is under 23(h), (i), (j), makes allegations, imputes false or unavowed motives, or uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder. That is exactly what the Premier did.

I appreciate that momentarily – I can only imagine what the Government House Leader is going to say. The reality is this, Mr. Speaker. The government is continuing to misrepresent the facts by making an allegation such as that, which is patently false. I would demand that the government prove this allegation, which we know is false because never have we proposed such a thing. The fact of the matter is that the Premier and the government are trying to divert from the fact that this UCP government is actually raising income taxes on every Albertan. They are raising taxes. It's in their budget. They are trying to do the old bait and switch or misdirect and point

blame to us when they are, in fact, the only party that is raising taxes on every single Albertan.

For that, Mr. Speaker, I request that the Government House Leader on behalf of the Premier withdraw those comments.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't think that's going to happen today. It is interesting to see how sensitive the Official Opposition is in regard to a PST. I'll use one quote from the Canadian Press. In March 2017 the now Leader of the Official Opposition, the then Premier, the leader of the NDP responds to a question in regard to a PST, and she goes on to say that bringing in a PST in Alberta might be talked about in the next election.

That's just one of many quotes associated with the NDP that I could utilize this afternoon, but I won't bother because you and I both know that this is clearly a matter of debate. Now, I as an Albertan am very shocked at the love affair that the NDP appear to have with the PST, and I certainly hope that if they ever are given the privilege of forming government again, they won't do that to Albertans. Mr. Speaker, I don't think Albertans will ever give them the privilege again, but that also is a matter of debate. This clearly is not a point of order, and we should move on with the day.

The Speaker: In fact, this is not a point of order. It is very clearly a matter of debate. The leader of the government made some statements that the Leader of the Opposition may disagree with from time to time. As it turns out, the Leader of the Opposition sometimes makes statements that the government also disagrees with. This is why we are here. This is a matter of debate, and as such it is not a point of order.

Speaker's Ruling
Bills Containing Similar Provisions

The Speaker: Hon. members, I am prepared to provide some guidance and ruling with respect to Bill 25 and Bill 205, that are both now on the Order Paper for second reading.

Bill 25, the Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, 2019, received second reading in the last 24 hours. Members will be aware that section 7 of Bill 25 would amend sections 4.1, 4.2(1), and 9(3.1) of the Human Tissue and Organ Donation Act. Bill 205, the Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Presumed Consent) Amendment Act, 2019, which will be placed on the Order Paper for second reading following the Assembly's concurrence in the committee's report, which happened this afternoon, proposes numerous amendments to the act, including the repeal and replacement of sections 4.1 and 9 and the amendment of section 4.2.

The principle at issue, as stated by Speaker Zwozdesky in his December 3, 2014, ruling, found on page 335 of *Hansard* for that day, is that "a Parliament or Assembly should not debate the same issue twice in the same session." *Erskine May's Treatise on the Law, Privileges, Proceedings and Usage of Parliament,* 25th edition, at page 634, notes:

> There is no general rule or custom which restrains the presentation of two or more bills relating to the same subject, and containing similar provisions. But if a decision of the House has already been taken on one such bill – for example, if the bill has been given or refused a second reading – the other cannot be proceeded with if it contains substantially the same provisions.

House of Commons Procedure and Practice, 3rd edition, at page 568 also provides that "two bills similar in substance will be allowed to stand on the Order Paper but only one may be moved and disposed of. If a decision is taken on the first bill . . . then the other may not be proceeded with."

Accordingly, Bill 25 has now received second reading. I must determine whether Bill 25 and Bill 205 contain substantially the same provisions. Although Bill 25 proposes amendments to sections of the Human Tissue and Organ Donation Act that Bill 205 also seeks to amend, I have concluded that the two bills, although inconsistent in some respects, cannot be said to contain substantially the same provisions.

In arriving at my decision that these two bills may both proceed, I reviewed *Erskine May's* summary of a somewhat similar case in the U.K. House of Commons, found at page 635 of the text, involving a government bill and a private member's bill with some overlapping provisions. On January 24, 1995, the Speaker ruled that although the bills clearly overlap,

> "in many respects they are incompatible and they cannot be said to contain substantially the same provisions. To the extent that their provisions differ and are incompatible, the House may at some stage have a choice to make between them,"

as I do today. The Speaker in that case

> did not . . . consider it right to prevent the House from proceeding with the second reading of either bill.

Accordingly, debate shall be allowed to proceed on Bill 205 if it is called in the Assembly for second reading. There is also nothing preventing the Committee of the Whole's consideration of Bill 25. I am confident that members will be able to work together to resolve any inconsistencies between the bills should both continue to progress through the stages of bill debate in this Assembly. This concludes my ruling.

As such, we are at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading

Bill 26
Farm Freedom and Safety Act, 2019

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

Mr. Dreeshen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move second reading of Bill 26, the Farm Freedom and Safety Act, 2019.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

This bill is the result of extensive consultations over months with agriculture stakeholders and fulfills our platform commitment to build common-sense farm workplace legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to start with quotes from the Alberta agriculture sector – these are farmers, farm workers, ranchers, and people in the industry – because ultimately this is a piece of legislation where we actually got consultation from the industry. As I mentioned, it took months in the making to get to this point. Just to read off some quotes, if you would indulge me, on what the industry folks, what people in the agriculture sector are saying about Bill 26, this was in the *Calgary Herald* today, from Will Verboven. The government "directly consulted producer organizations and the public at large and came up with legislation that takes a more common-sense approach to the farmworkers rights issue." Again, from Albert Cramer, the president of the Alberta Greenhouse Growers:

> The greenhouse industry is very thankful to the Government of Alberta . . . for [their] support in recognizing greenhouses as farms. Being excluded from the definition of farms under the Employment Standards Code was a huge challenge for our industry and we are grateful that this has been [reflected] in the Farm Freedom and Safety Act.

3:00

Tom Steve, Mr. Speaker, from the Alberta Wheat and Alberta Barley commissions, their general manager, said:

> In terms of the overall shape of the industry, consultation has been a critical feature of the new government [in terms] of Bill 6 and the Farm Freedom and Safety Act. We didn't have that under the previous government in 2015 when those changes were rolled out. We are very encouraged and optimistic about the future shape of farm safety legislation in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, here's Ryan Koeslag, the executive vice president for Mushrooms Canada, who said: we are very happy to see the Alberta government making agriculture a priority and applaud the minister's leadership – but we don't have to get into that – and consultative approach to building this policy and legislation; we are pleased to see that Bill 26, Farm Freedom and Safety Act upholds the right balance between recognizing all farms, big and small, having unique work challenges, and at the same time includes important farm safety standards.

Again, I'll go on, Mr. Speaker, to Maria Leslie from the Alberta Chicken Producers**,** who said: what stands out to me the most is the consultative process that's taken place throughout the entire process – to consult, then legislate, hearing from producers – we're really looking forward to seeing it come into legislation and how it rolls out with education for producers, what the supports are, if there are tools for producers with farm safety down the road; from an industry association perspective, we want to be able to support our producers as much as possible, so that's something that's very supportive to us.

Tom Lynch-Staunton, from the Alberta Beef Producers, said: one of the things we're very happy with is a focus on education and awareness and creating a culture of safety, rather than being heavily regulated and forced into compliance, so that you can create safety, and farmers and ranchers will want to make sure that their farms are as safe as possible.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, another industry quote is from Janet Krayden from the Canadian Mushroom Growers Association: the entire Alberta Agriculture team took a lot of time with us, and they really listened; they even came to the farm and met our workers and were able to go through what our issues were, and they listened, and because of that, we're able to make changes that are acknowledging that agriculture is unique, but also having the balance with farm safety.

Mr. Speaker, that's just a small sampling of industry reaction from farm workers and from farmers actually appreciative of something that we campaigned on back in April, that we would actually consult with the agriculture industry on how we could repeal the disastrous, failed NDP Bill 6. Going back a little bit into the history of 2015, when the NDP did bring in Bill 6, there are many members here in the Legislature that saw the massive farm protests. It was from farmers from across the province, Mr. Speaker, from every different commodity association that felt that they were having the rug pulled out from under them. It was a government that didn't consult, that didn't listen to them, and they implemented Bill 6 which had no practicality on a farm, and there was no way to actually implement it.

Over the years, the then government, the NDP government tried to tweak and make changes to Bill 6, but at the end of the day, it was always set up to fail, and that's why it's great to move second reading of Bill 26, which will finally get us past that disastrous phase in Alberta.

Again of disastrous phases, Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to mention that the Teamsters strike is finally over against CN. I'm glad that the Teamsters finally came to the table and are actually getting back to work. It's also nice to see that the Leader of the Official Opposition has ended her own self-imposed strike and is back here in the Legislature.

Mr. Dach: Point of order.

Mr. Dreeshen: Not only did we consult with farmers in 25 different consultations . . .

The Acting Speaker: I heard a point of order, but it is my understanding that that point of order has been decided to not be moved on, so if the hon. minister could please continue with his comments.

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, a little bit more on the consultations. We had 25 different consultation stops across the province, listening to thousands of farmers over the summer, but we also had an online survey as well that had over 1,000 different responses that came in. I put 8,000 kilometres on my truck driving to every corner of the province and having face-to-face meetings with farmers and farm groups and farm workers.

The four main themes that we consulted on during these consultations were employment standards, insurance, labour relations, and the Occupational Health and Safety Act. We also asked, as a fifth theme, to get farmers' actual direct input on research. That's something, again, that we campaigned on in April, Mr. Speaker, moving away from the previous NDP government's government-led research priorities to actual industry-led research priorities and actually having industry lead research decision-making in the future. Now that we've compiled all these 25 different consultations and all these online submissions, taken all this feedback to me and to the industry associations, I think we've actually built common-sense farm workplace legislation that actually works for farmers and ranchers and not against them.

This proposed legislation allows workers to have choice when it comes to workplace insurance. It exempts small farms from employment standards legislation and workplace insurance requirements. It ensures basic safety standards but provides flexibility on OH and S. It includes nurseries, greenhouses, mushroom and sod farms, ranches, and ranch employment standards that ultimately they will be exempt from. It reinstates the exemption for the farm and ranch sector from the Labour Relations Code, minimizes red tape, and reduces the regulatory burden on farmers and ranchers. Through the Farm Freedom and Safety Act, we're going to restore balance, fairness, and common sense to the regulation of Alberta's agriculture sector.

Ultimately, Mr. Speaker, we recognize that farms are unlike other businesses. Farmers and ranchers require flexibility in meeting labour and employment standards. This act allows farm employers to have choice when it comes to workplace insurance. The new legislation requires that some farm and ranch employers must have insurance but ultimately allows business operators and farms to choose what type of insurance works best for them and their employees. For example, large farms with six or more employees must have either WCB or private insurance. The previous government forced all farms to have WCB insurance, which, again, didn't make any sense. There were lots of farmers – and we heard it on our consultation tour – that had private worker insurance. They ended up having to pay their private worker insurance plus pay the mandatory WCB worker insurance, which ultimately duplicated their cost and was completely unnecessary, but again was the tone-deaf nature of Bill 6 in the previous government.

Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, we're also including nurseries, greenhouses, and mushroom and sod farm operations to have the exemptions from employment standards. These changes are directly based on feedback that we heard during these

consultations. This grassroots approach that we took was key because we know that operating a farm is unlike operating any other kind of business. Farmers and ranchers need that flexibility to meet their unique business needs. As they make investments to create new jobs in our communities and continue to contribute to our provincial economy, it's important to have a piece of legislation that actually encourages job growth, economic activity, and investment in our agriculture sector.

Mr. Speaker, coming from a farming background, this legislation means a lot to me and to the constituents of mine in Innisfail-Sylvan Lake. That's why I'm so honoured to move second reading of Bill 26, Farm Freedom and Safety Act, and to see through an important government platform commitment. Again, as a new minister in this government it was a great opportunity to be able to go out and talk to farmers and go to every corner of the province and actually talk individually to people. Lots of us here have heard of dome disease and that government officials and MLAs can be talking to bureaucrats and not have a good understanding of what happens outside in reality. I think in the farming sector there are no more down-to-earth, real people than farmers, being able to go out and talk to them and understand how they do what they do best. We've had farmers in this province for well over 100 years, and they've always cared about their employees. No one cares more about farm workers than farmers. It's great to see that now a government is actually being responsive to farmers. They're not thinking that their ideological bent somehow needs to be pushed down onto farmers.

Mr. Speaker, again, I'm very proud to move second reading. I'm looking forward to the ongoing debate and discussion on Bill 26. Thank you very much.

3:10

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any members wishing to speak on this matter? I see the hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Official Opposition has risen.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm not that pleased, really, right now to be speaking to this, but I am certainly pleased to have the privilege to begin debate on this matter on behalf of Alberta's Official Opposition. Ideological bent: that's the phrase that the minister of agriculture and former campaign worker for the current President of the United States, Donald Trump, described or attributed to those of us who would make Alberta the last province in the country to protect the health, safety, and working conditions of farm workers. Ideological bent. Here's an ideological bent: surviving at work, staying alive at work, not being permanently injured at work.

The reason our government and, in fact, many, many opposition members for decades leading up to our government pushed for Alberta to finally join the rest of the provinces throughout this country in providing the most basic of workplace protections to farm workers is because what we were seeing was that the agriculture industry actually saw the highest numbers of deaths per capita of any other industry in the province. People went to work and they died, Mr. Speaker, and there was no provision for protecting them. They were not covered under health and safety, and they had no access to compensation, and of course their family had no access to compensation should they die at work. So we thought: "Gee, that's strange. We are in Alberta, and Alberta farmers are some of the best farmers in the world, let alone in the country of Canada, and they are perfectly capable of ensuring basic minimum protections for their workers." That's why we brought in Bill 6.

Now, I'll be perfectly honest. The way it rolled out and the way people started talking about sort of the application of a broad range of the inapplicable and nonapplicable rules to farms created a great deal of fear and concern, and certainly we have to take responsibility for that. There is no question that what we then did do is that we spent at least two years meeting excessively with farmers in order to talk about practical applications of health and safety rules in the workplace. What we did not do, however, was delay the application of the Workers' Compensation Act to farms nor did we exempt them from simple, basic – basic – employment standards rules that you would expect to see in most developing countries, let alone in the province of Alberta. That is what we did.

Just to talk a little bit about the history, just to begin with this, as I said, we got off to a very bad start. Farmers were very concerned about the complexity of the particular safety regulations in particular that were going to be imposed upon them and the way in which they would be applied and enforced. There was a tremendous amount of work that went into working with farmers and different commodity groups. We had probably, if I recall correctly, about five or six different working groups where people sat around the table and spoke at great length about the particular elements of the agriculture industry to ensure that none of the rules that were put in place were too onerous. It was a lot of work. A lot of work. When that work was ultimately done, the vast majority of stakeholders who were part of that process were pleased that it had happened.

When we finally got the regulations in Bill 6 completed, we had the second vice-president of the Alberta Federation of Agriculture say about the changes that were brought in: it was about time. He said: you know, I don't want my kids and grandkids going into a career path, if this is what they choose, where they won't be treated well; we believe that farm worker protection is important, and I don't see a lot of changes that need to be made. These were changes that needed to be made from the changes that we brought in initially.

In 2018, when asked about the repeal of Bill 6, Albert Kamps, who was the chair of the ag coalition, said that repealing the farm safety act would be throwing out a lot of good with the bad. Yet that is what this government is proposing to do.

Let's talk about what has been ripped from farm workers, what rights have been exploited or stolen through the application of this bill to people who work for farmers in Alberta, rights that, as I've said before, are enjoyed by farm workers in every other part of the country, Mr. Speaker. I don't know why it is that we feel we have to wear the mantle of the most exploitive farm worker jurisdiction in the country, yet that seems to be something that our ideological minister of agriculture, in pursuit of imposing the values of the President of the United States onto the people of Alberta, thinks is wise for Albertans.

The first thing, of course, is the issue of the application of workers' compensation. Now, the minister suggested that he heard from people who were in a position of having to pay both. They had to pay for their private disability insurance, and they also had to pay for WCB. That's not true. No one is forcing them to pay for their private insurance. They were being told that they have to pay for workers' compensation.

Here's a news flash, folks. There is a tremendous amount of difference between what workers' compensation will provide if someone is injured and what certain disability plans will provide if someone is injured. A tremendous amount of difference. In most cases, the vast majority of cases, what you're going to see is a profound reduction in benefits that working Albertans who are employed on farms will enjoy. If farmers find that it is less expensive to pay for disability insurance or injury insurance than it is to pay for workers' compensation, I am willing to bet my house on the fact that it's because the benefits that would be provided to that injured worker will be substantially less. As a result, we are

making a very considered decision in this House to take money away from workers who are on farms, who do not have care and control of their workplace because they have to legally follow the directions of their employers, should they get injured, should they get permanently injured.

You know, we have the situation of the young man who was killed in a silo, whose body was mutilated in a silo, just a few years ago, and it was his accident at work that generated a fatality inquiry, which, of course, recommended a number of things, including the application of workers' compensation law so that his widow and his children would be left with something. But this government has decided that that is no longer necessary.

3:20

Now, this bill doesn't set any minimum standard for what the alternative disability or accident insurance should provide. For all we know, it could be one of those great little things, where, yeah, you sign here, and if somebody gets killed at work, yeah, there you go; there's your $30,000 payout. Yeah. Thanks, Dad. It was lovely knowing you until you died at work. Here's $30,000, compliments of Jason – compliments of the Premier and the UCP government. My apologies. I wouldn't want to say the name of the Premier in association with the decision to leave orphans without access to compensation benefits should their father die while working on a farm that is no longer required to provide for access to the orphans of the dead worker.

To be clear, there is an average of 18 workers who are killed on farms every year. Eighteen. It's actually been going up a little bit but on average 18. Eighteen workers die. Now what's happened is that this UCP government has suggested that they are not entitled and their family members are not entitled to benefits, to orphan benefits or to widow benefits, as a result of this act.

Now, the government itself suggests as well that they will be also exempting, I believe, farms with five or fewer permanent employees. That amounts to, according to the government, I believe about two-thirds of the farms. I'm just trying to see here somewhere in my notes. I think it suggests that it also means that we are exempting roughly – oh, it's somewhere here; just give me a moment here. Okay. I will find it and get back to you. But what we have is that we are exempting well over 50 per cent of farms and employees who work in farms from even the obligation to have any kinds of protection, whether it be WCB or even some other kind of alternative disability program.

What that means is that of those 18 people who die, probably 12 of them will find themselves with almost no eligibility for any kind of compensation for their family once they are killed at the workplace. That's, you know, 12 people roughly a year whose families will find themselves with virtually no longer any kind of compensation coverage. I appreciate, you know, that's only 12 families who are left with nothing. It's only 12 deaths. I guess folks over there can go to bed at night and say: "Ha, those 12 folks. Who knows? If we're lucky – we'll cross our fingers – maybe they don't have families. Maybe they're not married. Maybe they don't have kids. So we'll cross our fingers and hope because that way when they die, the 12 of them die, no one is going to care that there's no compensation for when they die." Maybe. The other six or so will be eligible for compensation, but it will be significantly less than what they were eligible for before. That's the 18 people or so that die every year.

Now, as well, since 2016, when Bill 6 came into effect, people then had the ability to apply for workers' compensation benefits should they be injured. Just to be clear, the number of people who were doing that: in 2016 it was 777 workers that were injured while working on a farm. In 2017 794 workers were injured and filed claims with workers' compensation because they were working on a farm. In 2018 it was 886 Albertans who work on farms that were injured and filed claims for workers' compensation. So far this year we are on track to exceed the number of 886 Albertans who work on farms who were injured.

Next year those roughly 900 people who are injured when working on farms will no longer be able to apply to WCB for benefits. Now they will have to file a claim with a private disability provider, and for all we know, they will get 30 per cent of what they would have gotten, 20 per cent of what they would have gotten. But – oh, wait – because roughly two-thirds of them are exempted completely from having to have any kind of coverage because they are now considered part of small operations, 600 people will get nothing. Maybe they, you know, fracture a disc. Maybe they are temporarily paralyzed from the waist down. Maybe they lose an arm. Maybe they have a dislocated shoulder. Maybe something falls on their head. These are all the kinds of things that happen in workplaces when people are injured, and they lose time from work. All those things can happen, and now, thanks to this government's actions, roughly two-thirds of them will have no claim for anything. About 600 Albertans injured every year: bye-bye.

I guess, you know, it's just part of making sure that we have the lowest standards of care for people who work on farms anywhere in the country of Canada. Great. You know, I have to tell you that I've met with a lot of farmers who really don't think that they need to be those people, but that's what this government is allowing to happen. That is workers' compensation. To be clear, this idea that we were forcing people to pay for both WCB and private insurance is ridiculous. The minister is incorrect. What we said is that they had to pay for WCB, and if some farmers were paying for more that is great, but no one said that they had to pay for more.

Now, what else have we seen as a result of this bill? To be clear, this bill goes farther. This bill actually makes the situation for people who work on farms worse than it was before we brought in Bill 6 in 2015. How? Well, we've expanded to include a whole swath of groups that were not exempted in the past, whose employees were entitled to be members of unions, to be covered under the Employment Standards Code, to receive the minimum wage, to have access to WCB. All those people in these additional areas that this government has decided to expand the application of this to, those people are now also exempted. We have taken quite an effective run at clawing back the rights of a whole schwack of people who were previously not even impacted by Bill 6 before because they already had rights, but these guys figured: "No, no. We need to expand the group of exploited employees in Alberta. That's our create-jobs plan."

It continues to amaze me when I hear members opposite suggest that their economic development plan is premised on the idea of paying people less or nothing or forcing them into situations where they get injured or ensuring they get no compensation for when they are injured, that sort of importing developing country standards into the province of Alberta is somehow part of some brilliant economic development plan. It's beyond backwards, Mr. Speaker.

3:30

What kind of other things have been clawed back from workers who work on the farm? Well, overtime, hours of work. Now to be clear, we were very responsive on these issues when we brought in Bill 6. We allowed for a tremendous amount of flexibility around overtime and around hours of work to accommodate the nature of farming and the sort of urgent nature that occurs at certain times of the year or with certain types of livestock or with certain processes, to allow for the kind of flexibility that farmers were asking for. But these guys thought: "No, no, no. No need to sort of balance people's

rights or balance people's needs. No, no, no. Heaven's no. We'll just get rid of all the standards." As far as I can tell, it seems that everybody has been exempted from the standards with respect to being eligible for overtime or ensuring that they are not forced to work more than 12 hours at a time because, you know, you might actually do something unsafe, like hurt yourself, if you're working 13, 14 hours. No; just keep working. There's no limit on that now.

Interestingly, this so-called small producer or small operator I think is the category, anyone that has five or fewer employees, which amounts to somewhere between half and two-thirds of the farmers that are out there, is not apparently covered by the Employment Standards Code at all anymore. From what we can tell between looking at the act and reading what is on the minister's own web page, it appears as though we've decided to exempt them from the minimum wage altogether. I don't even know how you do that, simply don't pay anybody minimum wage. Like, seriously, these folks aren't going to be entitled to minimum wage at all. Over half of the employees working on farms now will not be entitled to a minimum wage. I've just never seen anything like this before. It's shocking. You know, it's sort of *Oliver Twist*, Charles Dickens. Let's go right back to southern U.S., early 1800s. Why pay anybody anything? I guess that's how we're going to create jobs. Jobs, they say.

That is absolutely shocking to us. I don't know how folks over there sleep at night. Like, literally, you want your kids to go out and take a job where someone says: "Nah, today I've decided not to pay you. Sorry. That's how you run a business. I know you all showed up today. I know that you got injured and that you're probably not going to be able to work for another three to six months, but I've decided not to pay any of you because minimum wage doesn't apply." Yeah, that's what this legislation appears to do, as far as we can tell.

Another thing, of course, is that it worked very, very quickly – the very, very unorthodox and aggressive, I would say, bullying and unprecedented decision to bar at the introduction of this bill, at first reading, the access of any workers, either on small farms or larger farms, to the Labour Relations Code such that they can't unionize. Somehow we had to write it that way. We couldn't possibly let anybody debate it before we did that. I have no idea what the point of that was. I mean, it's an exceptionally undemocratic thing. You guys have a majority. You'll absolutely be able to strip basic constitutional rights to unionize from these workers until such time as some of them, you know, cobble together what pennies they have to go to the courts, to have the courts tell them that you're breaking the Constitution again. Somehow it was so important to you that you had to make that effective on first reading. Wow. You must really hate these workers. It's really shocking to me how much you guys must dislike people who work for farmers. I don't know why you have such a hate-on for them.

Mr. McIver: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The Minister of Transportation.

Point of Order
Imputing Motives

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, in 23(h), (i), and (j) it talks about imputing motives to another member that are not true, saying things designed to create disorder in the House. The Leader of the Official Opposition's ridiculous statement that "you must really hate [farm] workers," clearly falls under both those categories. Now, I understand that the Leader of the Official Opposition is upset about their severely unpopular legislation being overturned. She's certainly allowed to say that. She's certainly allowed to say she doesn't like our legislation. She's not allowed to make claims like that.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask you to respectfully ask the hon. member to withdraw and apologize for those remarks and then carry on with whatever diatribe she has remaining.

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has risen on this point of order.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's fairly transparent that we're talking about a matter of debate. We've just seen, mere moments ago, a ruling that the government is allowed to say that we're in favour of a PST despite the fact that we've never made any such statement because it's a matter of debate.

We're now dealing with a situation in which the government has brought forward legislation that basically takes away the rights of certain farm workers to work in a safe workplace, to have access to disability or death insurance should they be injured or killed. I think in terms of why it is that the government is doing that, you know, the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition was clearly speculating with respect to what the motives could be. This is clearly a matter of debate, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: I'm prepared to rule on this. At this point I do not believe that this was a point of order, the reason being that without the benefit of the Blues, it's my understanding that the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition was discussing the government generally.

That said, I would like to take the opportunity to mention that I think that where we are with the debate at this stage is that there could be some language that is getting close to causing disorder in the House. I would just take a moment to remind all members of the House to ensure that they do not use language to incite disorder within the House as the goal of this endeavour that we are in is to have effective debate, and language that causes disorder does not do that.

If the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona could please continue with her remarks.

Debate Continued

Ms Notley: Certainly, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for that. I'm certainly quite happy to hear from members opposite exactly why it was that they had to take the unorthodox and really quite unprecedented step of barring farm workers from access to the rights provided by the Labour Relations Code on the reading of the bill at first stage rather than letting it go through reading at all stages and the votes at all stages as with every other part of the bill. I'd be very curious to find out why that is. I mean, it is an extremely unorthodox and, I would say, heavy-handed step to take. It absolutely impinges upon my rights as a member of this Assembly to even debate this and to, you know, perhaps be successful at amending it because it's apparently already in effect. I'm not even sure what the rules of order are with respect to whether we can at committee even try to amend that section of the act since it apparently came into effect with first reading. It is really a heavy-handed strategy that is very unprecedented. I'm just not sure why it is that we have to have that particular element of this rather heinous piece of legislation jammed through so quickly. Like, was there an organizing drive under way somewhere that we didn't know about? I literally don't know.

What we do know is that actually very few workplaces were impacted by providing access to the Labour Relations Code, exactly

as we said when this first came into effect, but we wanted to give workers that opportunity should they at some point choose to seek out union representation. Mind you, it might be more applicable now given that we have so broadly expanded the number of workers who are exempt from these basic fundamental human rights. There's no question that we have added a very large number of working people to the list as a result of this, but I remain curious as to why this government had to remove these workers from the protection of the Labour Relations Code

3:40

I mean, it's quite, as I say, beyond the pale that we are actually suggesting that they're not protected by basic minimum wage laws. I think that probably they would care a lot more about that than access to the labour code because, in fact, up until now they were all getting paid the minimum wage and now they may not get paid anything. We don't know. I suspect that workers are more concerned about that than they are about access to the labour code in the immediate term. Then again, the Supreme Court of Canada has said that this is a fundamental right that all workers should have access to, so it is very troubling to me that the members opposite would have moved so fast to exempt workers from the application of the labour code.

Basically, what we've got here is a bill that is designed to attack the rights of some of Alberta's most vulnerable citizens and also the rights of many foreign workers and temporary foreign workers. You know, I'd say that it's probably fair to say that the majority of workers who will be impacted by this are people of colour, and I would argue that there's probably an adverse effect discrimination going on here on the basis of one's membership in a racialized community, but we will follow that . . .

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, point of order.

The Acting Speaker: The Minister of Transportation.

Point of Order
Language Creating Disorder

Mr. McIver: Again under 23(h), (i), and (j), language designed to create disorder in the House. The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Official Opposition just stood in her spot and suggested that this legislation is because the government is racist.

Ms Hoffman: She did not say that.

Mr. McIver: She did. She said that this is based on racial things. Certainly, the suggestion was there. That is language designed to create disorder. I respectfully request that you ask the hon. member to continue in a more appropriate manner.

The Acting Speaker: I will hear from the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Leader of the Official Opposition was speaking to the impact of these policies. I think it's well known that disproportionately the individuals who will be impacted by these policies are individuals who are more likely to be members of racial minorities. I think that there's good evidence for that. Again, this means that it's having an adverse effect, so this is possible. Policies do this all the time. When certain policies are put forward, whether it's the intention or not, they have impacts on people, and sometimes those people are members of minority groups at a greater rate than the general population.

Mr. Speaker, this is clearly a matter of debate. What we're talking about here are the facts, the population that this has an impact on and who the members of that population are. I think it's pretty clear that this is not a point of order, that this is simply a difference of opinion.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you hon. members. I'm prepared to rule. This, in my estimation, is a matter of debate and specifically a disagreement on the facts. Taking into account the previous point of order, I would take this opportunity to make a further statement to the House. Language that ultimately does create disorder in the House is one of the key aspects that we should be, obviously, not working towards. Points of order, though, in themselves do not necessarily showcase that that wording that is being used does create disorder. However, I think that in this circumstance we are seeing that points of order often are related to when language creates disorder within the House.

What I would ask is that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona ensure that the language that she uses focuses towards the bill at hand and that there is not any purpose behind the language to create disorder within this House.

If the hon. member would please continue.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for that ruling.

Debate Continued

Ms Notley: Let me just clarify. You know – there are some lawyers here in the House – there is a principle in law called adverse effect discrimination. Fundamental to it is the notion that it's not actually intentional but that sometimes laws are passed that have an adverse effect on a particular protected group under either human rights law or the Charter. Sometimes it's women; sometimes it's people by age; sometimes it's people with disabilities; sometimes it's people with, you know, different sexual orientations; sometimes it is racialized minorities.

The principle, adverse effect discrimination, is a legitimate point of law. I've argued on that principle numerous times in this House since first being elected, in 2008. I just want to assure the chair that in no way was I attempting to create disharmony or unhappiness in the House, but I would not be doing my job if I did not raise the potential of adverse effect discrimination arising from the contents of this bill. Indeed, that's what I was intending to do.

Going forward, though, Mr. Speaker, I think that, generally speaking, what we know is that we are creating a situation where a large number of working Albertans will not be paid as much. They will not work as safely. They will have fewer rights. Their rights under the Charter are being violated. They are being treated differently than almost every other worker like them in the country, at the hands of this government. Their families and loved ones are also being attacked by this bill because their eligibility for survivor benefits is being either eliminated or significantly jeopardized. Their right to be compensated should they be injured, in an industry which the evidence shows is very dangerous and has a much higher rate of injury than most other industries in the province, has been significantly attacked by the terms of this bill. These are the things that are happening in this bill.

Now, if we were in a situation where the application of Bill 6 had ended up looking like people had threatened or feared and smeared that it would look like back in December 2015, it might well be the case that changing the bill to support the rights of Alberta's farmers would be an important step in supporting their economic well-being. However, it is my view and it is the view of many farmers themselves who participated in good faith in the more than two years of consultations that our government undertook after the

introduction of Bill 6 that in fact what we ultimately reached in Alberta was a reasonable compromise and that it did not impede the ability of Alberta's farmers to do the best they can economically in their field.

3:50

I get that there are many things challenging Alberta's farmers these days, not the least of which was the recent CN strike, the bad harvest this year, previous bad harvests, commodity prices. I know there are many things that Alberta farmers struggle with each and every year, and it's an industry that is harder and harder to make one's way in. But that being said, one doesn't make one's way in an industry by insisting on having a set of rules for one's employees which are the lowest and the most unsafe in the country and exempting them from basic principles like access to the minimum wage.

I actually do look forward to being corrected by members opposite on this matter of the minimum wage because, honestly, we saw it on a web page of the government, suggesting that we were actually exempting these folks from the minimum wage. I actually find that so shocking. I can't believe it's actually true, so I would be happily corrected by any member opposite about the access to basic minimum wage rights for any worker employed in these small operations. We certainly do need clarity about this because it's the government's own briefing and the government's own web page that suggest that these workers would not actually have a right to any minimum wage. I certainly hope that that will be corrected, but if it's not, well, then we're going to hear a lot more about that because that's, obviously, kind of a basic, fundamental breach of UN human rights, that I can't imagine most folks over there, even, would actually sign on to.

With that having been said, I will happily cede the floor and look forward to having a more detailed discussion about the terms in this bill and hearing from the government, in particular, why it is that workers who are injured need to have the compensation to which they are entitled so significantly reduced, why it is that workers in big, commercial agriculture operations need to have their Charter rights so significantly attacked by this government, why it is that they should be compelled to work more than 12 hours a day without a rest break, why it is they should not be eligible for basic minimum wage payments. These things are all very critical questions that need to be asked. These thousands and thousands of people who work on Alberta's farms are also Alberta citizens, and, to me, I just don't understand why it is that we would treat them as if they were not.

With that, I cede the floor and look forward to having anybody else offer up comments. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tempted to say, any time I follow the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition in debate on the same subject matter, "Yeah, what she said; ditto," because of her eloquence in delivering and her total coverage of the subject matter six ways from Sunday. It's always a challenge to follow a debater with the skill of the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition. But, yea, though I walk in the valley of the totally covered subject matter, there is more to say on the topic. I think I speak from some personal experience when I talk about WCB coverage and the effects that it has on families, those that find themselves with coverage and the effect that it will have on paid farm workers, those that find themselves without coverage at all or perhaps with diminished coverage as a result of the legislation, Bill 26, the so-called Farm Freedom and Safety Act, 2019, which certainly has no freedom involved for farm workers and diminishes their safety.

In my consultations with stakeholders and experts, whether they be academics in the field or occupational health and safety experts, one of the things that I found very recently – and it was very disappointing and disheartening, shocking, and it made me angry to know – is that there's a chill that has descended over this province among those who would seek to express an opinion publicly in dissent to any government position that might be brought forward, whether it be legislation or regulation. It's a chill that I felt growing up in this province during 44 years of PC reign, when you would find that nobody wanted to speak out publicly about government policy in any form of dissent for fear it might hurt them, for fear it might hurt their business, that they would suffer the wrath of the existing Conservative hegemony, for fear that they might not get promoted, for fear that they may not have the opportunity to apply for a grant or to perhaps receive further funding for a research project, for fear that their career would be under threat.

Mr. Speaker, when government members opposite talk about this party in opposition creating fear in the province – I'll tell you what – there's no greater source of fear in this province than the government of Alberta's policies towards the workers of this province as expressed in Bill 26, the Farm Freedom and Safety Act, 2019.

People who would normally be expected to have expert opinions brought forward and heard on the floor or at least allow their names to stand in opposition to the measures contained in this bill are saying: certainly, I'll talk to you on the phone, but don't use my name because I really don't want my research grant to be pulled; I don't want funding to be cut; because of my fear for the 15 or 20 people who work under me who would no longer have employment if, indeed, I was to come out and express publicly my opinion about this piece of legislation. That is the chill on democracy that we've seen before. I grew up with it. When you went to school and high school and university, with that chill in effect, where public servants, where individuals who would be fully expert in their field wouldn't deign to say something publicly because they feared retribution in some form or another from the existing government, the Conservative government of the day.

That same fear now is totally embedded throughout the province, and I'm very, very concerned about that. Bill 26, in my efforts to consult with stakeholders, is a perfect example of the type of intimidation tactic that this government has placed on opponents to any piece of legislation that this government brings to the floor of this House. Certainly, Mr. Speaker, there's no fear on this side of the House about bringing those concerns forward to the Legislature and also, as publicly as possible, to represent those who've been muzzled by this government or feel they can't afford to risk their job or their funding to come forward and talk in opposition to this government's proposals and proposed legislation.

I heard earlier this afternoon on a different matter the Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat cite the universal declaration of human rights in relation to how it supported the families and their rights to choose the education of their choice for their children. Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you something else that the universal declaration of human rights also protects, in article 23. It protects the rights of working people. It protects their rights to work. I'm quoting from article 23 right now, which I'll table although I'm sure it's been tabled in the House numerous times when people stand to protect workers' rights and the universal human rights that all of us should enjoy, although in Alberta that seems to be something the government doesn't believe in. Article 23, universal declaration of human rights:

> (1) Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.
> (2) Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.
> (3) Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.

4:00

Finally, Mr. Speaker, under article 23 of the universal declaration of human rights:

> (4) Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.

The universal declaration of human rights, relied upon to support the argument earlier this afternoon of the Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat, equally applies to the rights of workers. Indeed, this government is totally ignoring that declaration of human rights when it comes to, in fact, the introduction of this legislation. The moment it passed first reading, what this legislation did was deny the right of workers on farms to organize and form a union.

In many cases we've heard members of the government suggest that it would just apply to a small number of people so it really has no bearing; it's an insignificant piece of the legislation. If indeed it was that insignificant, why in the world did they find it necessary to make it for the first time in Alberta government history, I believe, enforceable upon the passing of first reading of the act? It's totally shameful, or perhaps I should say shameless. The government seems to be proud of attacking workers whenever they possibly can. They love to beat their opponents and reward their supporters in legislation, which aren't necessarily the rules of the game that a fair-minded government will employ when looking to govern this province with legislation and bring forward legislation to benefit Albertans.

As I mentioned, in my consultation with stakeholders, occupational health and safety experts, they are universally appalled by this legislation, knowing that indeed it's going backwards and backwards in time. That's really what this government has been doing since day one with legislation aimed at turning back the clock in so many respects. I'll remind the House that the date is 2019. It's not 1919, but 1919 is a date that we should remember in Canada. Of course, I speak about the date 100 years ago when we had the Winnipeg General Strike. The Winnipeg General Strike resulted in the deaths of some workers at the hands of police in a strike that was designed to establish the rights of working people to organize, form unions, and negotiate an agreement with their employer and have those rights enshrined in law. In fact, the Canadian Constitution does have those rights enshrined, so it's another significant document that this legislation flaunts and this government chooses to totally ignore. In fact, it's insulting to have a government in this province, my province, suggest that workers' rights are something that they can ignore with impudence.

I say, Mr. Speaker, that there will be a price to pay for this. I've taken a few taxi rides lately. I know it's anecdotal, but very seldom have I had cab drivers offer opinions about what people are saying. The first thing they talk about is: "Why in the world did they pass that law to fire that guy, you know, the guy that was talking about investigating the election of the leader? And what the heck is going on with people who want to form a union? They can't do that anymore? Is that something that's not possible? I thought that we had a Constitution in this country." Well, in fact, they're right. We do. People are talking, although some people are unwilling to come forward and to speak publicly for fear of retribution from this government, and that's the aura that we've now begun to live under once again in this province.

It makes me more than a little bit angry when the government members suggest that we are an angry opposition. You better believe we are because we reflect what's going on in the province, and the members of this society who respect working people are more than a little angry once they get over the shock and dismay of the gall of this government to go ahead and do such things as disregard the universal declaration of human rights and our Canadian Constitution by taking away the right to organize from our working people. Although they may be a small group of people on farms – and calling it an ideological bent, that is unacceptable, to say the least. The protection of health, safety, and rights of farm workers: the universal declaration of human rights has this embedded in it. It's done so to protect workers who are in some of the most dangerous kinds of work in the world. Of course, I speak about agricultural work, farm work. It is one of the most dangerous workplaces. In fact, in Alberta it is the most dangerous workplace to work in.

We brought in Bill 6 to address concerns and to bring Alberta in line with other provinces so that the workers in Alberta could actually have the same protections that workers in every other province and jurisdiction of the country enjoyed. It also allowed us to fall in line with the Constitution and the universal declaration of human rights regarding the rights of workers. Certainly, we have no disagreement that the farm is a unique place of employment in this province. Be that as it may, it doesn't exempt the farm from the obligation of providing a safe work environment and also worker protection as far as their right to organize goes. I know that the government has asked us to examine and consider the options that have been given to farmers, where you would have WCB insurance versus a private insurance option. But I ask members to consider what, in fact, benefits you would get if you are the victim of an accident and you have had the necessity as an insured worker under WCB, if you've had that happen to you, what you actually find yourself doing to support your family.

When I mentioned that at the beginning of my remarks, Mr. Speaker, I talked about having some personal experience in the field. It didn't happen to be myself who suffered an injury in the workplace. It was my dad. Over the course of his construction career, which is a significantly dangerous career as well though not as dangerous as the agricultural sector, he suffered four different injuries which required time off and recovery during periods of receiving WCB benefits. Let me tell you that if it weren't for those WCB benefits, we would have been out of our house, on the street, perhaps living in the basement of relatives or anybody else who would take us in. Us six kids who were living under WCB benefits never knew what financial straits we were in. We knew things were tight, but because of the management of my parents, they managed to keep a roof over our heads and us fed. Subsequently I learned that at the end of each month, we had three bucks left over. There was a lot of hardship, but we actually were able to get by, even with the benefits of WCB.

That is what the government wants to take away or deny farm workers as a result of the passage of this bill to supposedly provide freedom and safety to farm workers, the security of an insurance that will at least allow a family to survive during a period of convalescence. At one point it was actually a period of two years where my father was not working, and we certainly were grateful for that coverage.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions and comments should anybody wish to take that opportunity.

Seeing none, are there any other individuals wishing to speak on this matter? I see the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler has risen.

Mr. Horner: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today to speak in support of Bill 26, Farm Freedom and Safety Act, 2019, the bill to replace Bill 6, the slap to the face from the previous government to small farms and families all across the province. For a little context for this House, I'm a beef producer farmer, and I employ one full-time employee. We ranch and live in outback Alberta, at least an hour's drive in any direction to buy a jug of milk or find a bank. I'm not complaining. It's the wide open prairie: land too poor and region too dry to farm more than pockets, but great natural cattle country. It takes a pretty large spread to run enough cows to raise a family, so neighbours are far apart, and there are not many amenities for newcomers or people looking to start a life. I'm telling you this to explain the relationship, at least in my case, between employee and employer in rural Alberta. You cannot attract labour and you definitely cannot retain labour by treating workers poorly or asking workers to perform unsafe tasks.

4:10

For the purposes of this speech and to try not to embarrass him, I'll refer to the wonderful employee who works for me and with me as Bill. After a death in the family I had the opportunity to buy the family farm at a young age. I was in my early 20s. This is rare for intergenerational farms. It usually happens a lot later in life, but I embraced the challenge, got a bank to believe in me but knew I would need full-time help. Shortly after, I met Bill. Bill and I are the same age. He was born and spent his youth in Mexico, worked in agriculture throughout the U.S. as a young man, and ended up working in Leamington, Ontario on a tomato farm. It was in Ontario that Bill met his wife, who I'll call Susan. She will hate that if she ever hears this. Bill and Susan decided to come west, following the advice of family and friends, in search of opportunity and a safe place to start a family.

So Bill and I met. He needed a job, and I needed help in a hurry. We were a week away from seeding. When we seed this upcoming spring, it will be 15 years that Bill and I have worked together. Along the way we've learned a lot and from each other. I've learned how to be a more compassionate, flexible employer, to never ask something of someone you would not do yourself and that understanding Bill and Susan's life away from the job is more important than the job. This hasn't always been easy. There have been many hurdles along the way.

One of the main issues, and how this ties back to Bill 26, is in regard to health and safety. Farms and ranches can be dangerous, no question, full stop. Livestock are big and strong with strong fight-or-flight instincts. If you're new to handling cattle, things as basic as how to stand when running a sorting gate or how to approach an animal in tight quarters make all the difference between a safe task and a dangerous one. Equipment is fast-moving and unforgiving. PTOs, post pounders, and augers have led to many a wreck, many horrible, some even fatal. Bill was new to handling cattle. He'd worked on some extremely large feedlots in the corn belt but had never really gotten out of the feed truck, so we always tried to be training and explain why we do things: try standing here when loading the crowding tub, how to load the liner in a safe way for the cattle and for you.

In around our second year together Bill cracked his wrist. He had a gate come back at him while loading some yearlings. I remember this event clearly. He received a cast in town and returned to work the next day. I asked him what he was doing here. Whenever I break something, they usually say four to six weeks. He said that he didn't know how this worked. On the huge feedlot in Iowa or on the industrial tomato farm in Ontario you felt like a number and could just be replaced. I sent him home to chill with his family and said: come back when you're healed. He asked if anything would change regarding pay while he was laid up. I said: "Of course not. You were hurt working for me." I joked with him: "I doubt I could replace you if I tried." He thought it was a joke; I was kind of serious. Not many want to live in Pollockville, Alberta, and it would take me years to train them up to how we do things. I told him that he was stuck with me.

After the cracked wrist we decided to get some workplace insurance just for peace of mind. It was a simple plan that covered Bill and his wife whether he was hurt at work or not and while he travelled. This policy seemed to suffice for a couple of years. Once in a while Bill would get terrible gout. He used to say that it was from gorging himself on tomatoes from his couple of years in Ontario. One day while visiting his doctor for gout relief, they did some tests and found that he had poor-functioning kidneys. Bill didn't seem totally surprised. He said that it runs in his family. He has since stabilized his condition through diet and lifestyle changes, but it will never get better. His doctors have told him that he can maintain this for a long time, but at some point he very well could need a kidney transplant. This forced Bill to think about his own mortality and his family's future. It kick-started a desire to try and pursue a life insurance policy. He soon learned that locking down a life insurance policy was basically impossible with a prediagnosed condition.

We made some inquiries and after many dead ends found a group policy that, with my wife and I involved, we could qualify for. That's what we did. Bill now has coverage that protects him, his wife, and all three of their children. It has a full dental plan for their entire family. It covers them anywhere in the world at any time. It has disability and a life insurance rider payable to his family. We did this around 2011. No government had to tell me to.

When Bill 6 was brought forth by the previous government, I remember being shocked that what I was doing as an employer was not good enough. I remember telling Bill that the government wants me to sign on to WCB insurance. He was quite concerned that I would cancel our existing policy in favour of WCB. I could not do that to him and his family, so I signed up for the WCB coverage and just paid the extra fees.

The linkage to occupational health and safety was a huge concern for most small employers like me. It just doesn't reflect farm realities. I remember hearing about an information session on Bill 6 where people were talking about working farm hours. Someone asked: what about calving season, up all night trying to save as many calves as you can? The response was: well, just turn the bulls out during the day. It would have been hilarious if it wasn't so scary and ridiculous.

I'm proud to have been part of the consultation process on Bill 26 with the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry. I think the bill represents a balance of the different realities between small farms and bigger, more industrial farms. We need to aspire towards a culture of farm safety always. It's critical that we continue to teach and present the dangers of farm work in schools and out.

As for Bill and Susan, they are staples in our community, have three kids in our local school, and are working towards owning their own home. When I decided to run for this role, I had to ask his permission. When I asked my wife, the first thing she said was: have you talked to Bill? Bill and my wife gave me permission, he got a raise, and here we are.

I realize not every situation is the same, but this is a story I knew to tell. Bill 6 was a terrible bill built in urban Alberta to appease organized labour. We know how to take care of our people on small

farms in Alberta because they're like family. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. Member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Member for Calgary-West has risen.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Those were certainly wonderful comments by my hon. friend. You know, I know that he is a farmer. I know that there are many farmers within the United Conservative caucus. I would certainly like him to talk a little bit about his experiences not only farming but certainly the experience on Bill 6, which is something that I was a part of in this Chamber during the last Legislature, when there were thousands – not hundreds, Mr. Speaker, thousands – of Albertans on the front steps of this Legislature protesting Bill 6. Maybe, or maybe not, that member was a part of that.

I would like to know what impact that Bill 6 had had on the community which he certainly represents and is a part of. I'd also like to know, Mr. Speaker, what experience, I guess I'm going for, people like him bring to the table, and maybe, when people are commenting about certain subjects which they have no experience on, what possible adverse effects that that may have when they're certainly criticizing someone who is a farmer, who owns a farm, who understands what it is to be a farmer.

You know, I do remember the former minister. I forget the exact context, but I know it became very much a running joke within this Legislature, the thought that calving could only occur during the daytime. It completely tells me the absolute naïveté of the previous government and, I would argue to say, the current members of the Official Opposition, so I would like him to make a few comments in regard to this.

Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question from the hon. Member for Calgary-West.

I remember the Bill 6 rally very clearly. I was not present, but I had very many neighbours and friends that took part, and it was mostly a feeling of shock. You know, when people read the original bill, if I recall, before there were some amendments, they said: oh, this is going to kill 4-H. The family exemptions weren't there yet. Our 4-H clubs were concerned.

4:20

I have a lot of elderly neighbours that use seasonal help that thought it would have to speed up their retirement. We already are seeing a big turnover in rural Alberta with larger farms swallowing up the smaller farms. It's about economies of scale. It's about technology. Plain and simple, a bill like this just made it impossible for the smaller farms to have the safety protocols in place with a small number of employees. That was where you saw a lot of this. It was elderly couples. They'd worked their whole lives. They weren't ready to sell their farm and retire, but they couldn't take on the additional help to continue on with their farm.

The adverse effect? Well, it made a lot of people angry. It made a lot of people upset. They didn't know why decisions were being made from the halls of urban Alberta when they weren't being listened to. They thought they had common-sense objections and amendments that could be made, and it just seemed to fall on deaf ears.

A lot of the farm data that was used to propose some of this I have a big problem with. At my house where I live, if you go a quarter mile behind my house, 400 yards, there's a body of water. If my two-year-old son crawls through the fence, makes it out there, and drowns in that body of water, that is a farm accident. If the exact same situation happens in a house backing onto a park in an urban area, it's just an accident. There are things in play when we live within where we work, and that can't change in rural, farming Alberta. Decisions that involve how we live with our families, with our hired people: they need to consider that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak against Bill 26, the so-called Farm Freedom and Safety Act, and I want to address a couple of points that have been raised by the members opposite during debate.

First of all, they continue to point to the number of protesters who were out on the steps of the Legislature as justification for the bill that they're bringing forward here to this Chamber. I would certainly hope that if the number of protesters is an indication of the urgency of a matter, then they would look at the number of protesters who were on the steps of the Legislature when Greta Thunberg was here. It was tens of thousands of people, the biggest rally in Alberta Legislature history. The members here in the incel caucus to my right are laughing at the issue, but the issue of climate change is urgent . . .

Point of Order
Language Creating Disorder

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, under Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j), language designed to create disorder in the House: the hon. member just called the members of the government the incel caucus. I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. If you can't draw the line here, I'm not sure where you can draw the line. I would respectfully ask you to insist that the hon. member apologize and withdraw the remark. If there's anything designed to create disorder in the House, we just heard it loud and clear. I realize it's your decision; I'm not pretending it's not. If you can't have this withdrawn, I guess there's no line.

The Acting Speaker: I see that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is rising on this matter.

Mr. Schmidt: I apologize and withdraw my comments. I'm sure that that's not the last we'll hear from the Minister of Transportation during the next 15 minutes.

Debate Continued

Mr. Schmidt: If the number of protesters on the Legislature is any indication of what the government will take seriously and deal with as a matter of urgency, then climate change would be the number one issue that this government is dealing with rather than giving away $4.7 billion to their corporate friends.

The other issue that I want to raise is, you know, that the accusations about misinformation that has been propagated by members of our caucus while discussing matters of public policy that the government is bringing forward pale in comparison to the misinformation that those members spread during the Bill 6 debate, which I was here for. Of course, the Member for Drumheller-Stettler and the Member for Calgary-West referred to one of the classic pieces of misinformation that was continually repeated during debate, this idea that somebody from our caucus or somebody from the agriculture ministry made this comment about

turning bulls out during the day so that people don't have to calve at night. That's ridiculous. There's no proof that anybody ever made that statement. It's a Facebook meme, but of course we see a government that's run by Facebook memes now, so we understand, of course, why they continually believe this garbage that they tell each other.

Anyway, I do want to also address one of the issues that was repeatedly raised during the Bill 6 debate and is being raised now, this issue that farmers are nothing but good employers who treat their employees with the utmost respect and pay them what they're worth and deal with their safety standards as a matter of urgency. This issue was triggered by the fact that the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, I believe, earlier today had guests from the Alberta sugar beet farmers. With respect to sugar beets, Mr. Speaker, we have a terrible history of forced labour in agriculture in this province that I want to remind all members of this House of.

First of all, I want to refer to an article that was dated February 11, 2018. It's called Sweet Irony: Zen Garden Memorializes Forced Labour on Alberta Sugar Beet Farms. It was published by the Canadian broadcaster. It talks about an artist who is a descendant of sugar beet farmers in the Lethbridge area. She describes what her great-grandparents and grandparents were forced to do during the Second World War. Because they were farmers in British Columbia and because they were of Japanese descent, they were forced to give up their farm to the government of Canada and move to Picture Butte, Alberta, and were forced to labour on sugar beet farms during the Second World War and for five years after the Second World War ended. She describes the conditions that her grandparents and great-grandparents had to live through.

> At the farm her family was made to live in an old granary with no insultation. In the winter, many people grew ill.
>
> "A lot of people died from that illness," said McKinnon. "It was hard, and the labour was tough, too, it's very difficult to grow and harvest."
>
> Working sugar crop fields, both cane and beet, is notoriously brutal work. Despite the hardship, her family survived and McKinnon's mother was born on the farm.

That is the history of Japanese-Canadian internment labour on Alberta sugar beet farms.

But those weren't the only people who were forced into labouring on Alberta sugar beet farms, Mr. Speaker. I want to share with the House another story that was also published by the Canadian broadcaster. This one is dated June 18, 2017, and says 'You Had No Choice': Indigenous Manitobans Shed Light on Exploitative Farm Labour Program that Ran for Decades. The subtitle is: Called 'Grab-a-hoe Indians,' Were Recruited to Work Sugar Beet Farms with Brutal Conditions, Little Pay. Now, Rebecca Bone of Camperville, Manitoba, in the story talks about being forced by the government of Canada to work on the sugar beet farms of southern Alberta. She describes it like this: "We worked until our hands were blistered, our skin was burnt and we were always hungry." They worked 12 to 14 hours a day, were not offered water, much less food to eat, and went home with $300 in their pockets if they were lucky. And you know the reason why, Mr. Speaker, they were forced to work on these sugar beet farms? Because the government of Canada threatened to take their children away from them if they didn't do it. That is the legacy of some of the farm labour here in Alberta that we have to deal with. This isn't in our grandparents' or great-grandparents' history.

This article goes on to say, Mr. Speaker, that these people were forced to work for next to no money . . . [interjections]

4:30

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, I just want to remind those members of the House that there will be ample time to debate this issue, and if they have any questions or comments, there is 29(2)(a) available. All debate should be referred through the Speaker.

If the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar could please continue.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's concerning to me that the Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock wants to make light of the issue of forced labour on sugar beet farms during debate.

Point of Order
Imputing Motives

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, I think that in that case that would constitute imputing a motive to the hon. member. I would ask that the hon. member withdraw that comment, apologize, and please continue with his comments.

Again a reminder to the whole House that we are endeavouring to have an effective and useful debate in this House, which also then would require all of us to ensure that we use language that is not abusive or insulting as that would lead to disorder in this House.

Mr. Schmidt: I apologize and withdraw, Mr. Speaker.

Debate Continued

Mr. Schmidt: What I was going to say is that this was a government program that was enforced upon indigenous people, that continued on until the 1980s, Mr. Speaker. That means that when I and a lot of my caucus colleagues were happily enjoying preschool, spending our time watching *Sesame Street* and eating snacks, playing on the street with our friends, these indigenous citizens were forced to labour for next to nothing for Alberta sugar beet farmers. That is also the labour history of farmers and their employees in this province.

I appreciate the fact that most farmers are good employers, and I appreciate the fact that most farmers are concerned about safety conditions and pay for their employees on their farms. But, Mr. Speaker, we have a tragic history of exploiting labour here on farms in our own province, and that's why we have legislation like this, to protect farmers and their employees on the farm. We cannot rely on every single farmer being a good employer. We cannot rely on every farmer who employs somebody to work on their farm to pay them a fair wage and ensure that they have safe working conditions. That's why it was necessary for us to bring in Bill 6, that ensured farm workers the right to safe working conditions and the right to organize so that they can protect themselves and fight for fair wages and solid working conditions.

It is a shame, Mr. Speaker, that in defence of this legislation we are whitewashing Alberta's history with respect to farm labour, and I think that we need to just be honest with ourselves about what has happened in the past in this province, reconcile ourselves to what has happened, and admit that we need to do better as a province to protect farm labourers so that those kinds of exploitative conditions cannot be repeated under any circumstances on any farm in this province.

The other point that I wanted to make, Mr. Speaker, is that, of course, we see again in Bill 26 an attack on labour unions, this time making it completely illegal for farm employees, farm workers to organize themselves into a labour union. Members of my caucus have asked the question: why would the UCP strip somebody's constitutional right to organize? I think I'm willing to provide the answer. It's because organized labour is a legitimate threat to their power.

If you want any indication as to how seriously they take this threat to their power, you only need to look at the fact that on day 1

of the CN Rail strike the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake stood up on his hind legs and demanded that Justin Trudeau and the federal government . . .

Mr. Ellis: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

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

Point of Order
Insulting Language

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much. Under 23(h), (i), and (j) he certainly said – and I don't have the benefit of the Blues in front of me – that the Minister of I believe it was Agriculture and Forestry . . .

The Acting Speaker: I am going to rule on this point of order. I am going to ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to withdraw and apologize, the statement regarding hind legs.

Before you do that, I'm just going to look for a nod from the Member for Calgary-West to ensure that that was the point of order that he was raising. Okay.

If the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar would withdraw and apologize for the insulting language that he used.

Mr. Schmidt: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I apologize and withdraw. The next time I'll say that he stood on his front legs.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker . . .

The Acting Speaker: We are moving on to the next speaker. Are there any . . .

Mr. McIver: I have a point of order, in that case, Mr. Speaker.

Point of Order
Insulting Language

Mr. McIver: Under 23(h), (i), and (j). Mr. Speaker, you just did the right thing. You made the member apologize and withdraw, and he repeated the insult using "front legs" instead of the – I'm sorry. I know the hon. member doesn't like the rules here. I know the hon. member doesn't care for any level of decorum or respect here, but I'm sure even his own teammates at this point are embarrassed. I think that to maintain the dignity of the House, I would respectfully ask you to insist that he apologize and withdraw for repeating what he just had to apologize for and withdraw about two seconds before he said it.

The Acting Speaker: I'd like to rule on this. I would ask that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar withdraw and apologize for the comment that he made regarding front legs as in my mind I do not see the difference within the context of how it was used immediately after the previous apology.

Mr. Schmidt: I apologize and withdraw it, Mr. Speaker.

Debate Continued

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

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, a number of my colleagues have spoken to this bill already. I don't propose to go on for a long time. I would certainly concur in the comments of the Leader of the Official Opposition and Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on a number of points that she said, but I think there is just one thing I would like to clarify, simply because I feel strongly about it because of my time, before I came to this House, in which I was a practising lawyer.

What frustrates me more than anything, Mr. Speaker, is when we're having a conversation that isn't about the actual facts. I think, you know, when we're talking about this bill, the part that frustrates me the most is the conversation we've had around workers' compensation insurance. Now, I had certainly worked with the workers' compensation system as it stood before we were in government, and there were a series of flaws with that system. I don't deny it. It was definitely not a perfect system. We did a lot to change that system, and I think we did a lot to improve that system. I think it's a much better system than it was. But this idea that people ought not to be subject to WCB because they can buy other insurance out there that's better: I think I need to quarrel quite loudly, I suppose, or at great length with that point because I just don't think that it aligns with the actual facts.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The purpose of WCB insurance, Mr. Speaker, is that it's no fault. It's no-fault insurance. So if a worker is injured, they get compensation. If a worker is killed, their family gets compensation. That's it. It's the beginning and the end of the matter. That is a very different situation than when you are dealing with private insurance. When you are dealing with private insurance, the insurer has the right to step into the shoes of the person so insured and litigate a matter. What does that mean? Well, what it means is that if a worker is injured, if a worker is killed, it is not necessarily for the insured to decide whether or not that worker will be compensated.

4:40

And I agree with the members opposite, the members of the government. It is absolutely true that there are farmers this country over who would buy that insurance voluntarily, who would comply with WCB, who would comply with OH and S and do all of that voluntarily, who care very deeply for their workers, who do things for them that are over and above the law. I absolutely agree that that is the case. I'm not quarreling with that at all. I'm not saying that it's 100 per cent of people, because it isn't. In fact, you make the laws for the people who are not behaving well on their own. That is usually the case with the law. The fact that we have a prohibition on murder isn't because everyone walking around out there is a murderer; it's because some people are.

But I think the members opposite are absolutely right. Most farmers would do the right thing in this case. But they don't necessarily get to make that decision. If someone is injured or killed on their farm and that person or that person's family seeks compensation, the insurer has the right to step into the shoes of the insured and run the case, instruct the lawyers. That is how an insurance contract works.

Mr. Speaker, the problem becomes – and, you know, we see this in the States a lot, where an injured worker is attempting to sue their employer. This is a worker who's injured. They can't return to the work they were doing. Usually they're already a marginalized person who has limited employment options to begin with. Essentially, their family is left with no ability to pay the rent, with no ability to buy food, with no ability to do anything for years and years and years while the matter is tied up in litigation. The family of a worker who has been killed on a farm doesn't need compensation six years from now, when the case resolves. They need compensation now. That person's wife and children need to

eat now. They need to have shelter now. They don't have time to wait years and years for a case to resolve.

Again, many insurance companies will behave well, but we make laws for the ones who don't. There are certainly many cases in which a party with greater financial resources essentially engages in what would be termed exhaustion litigation. That means that they bring forward motion after motion after motion after motion, assuming that the injured worker who is suing them does not have the financial resources to send their lawyer to court over and over and over. Eventually they drop the case because they don't have the financial resources to continue, especially in light of the fact that they're unemployed.

Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I consider it quite an emotional issue because I have met people in these circumstances. These are real cases. These are real people, who really exist, who find themselves in a position of having been injured and having to seek compensation and being unable to get it. And whatever flaws may or may not exist in the WCB process, at least we're not dealing with an injured party who is essentially trying to sue an insurance company with vastly greater resources being tied up in litigation for years and years. That is my primary concern.

This conversation that we are having with the public about how lots of insurance is better than WCB is just false. It may be better in the sense that it is less expensive for the person who is insured to buy, but it is certainly not better from the perspective of the worker or the worker's family, who, rather than getting immediate compensation in the case of WCB, now has to wait for years and years while the matter is tied up in court and litigated, sometimes on grounds that are not meritorious, sometimes on grounds that have no basis in law. Sometimes the insurance company will just run a case to see if they can get the plaintiff to go away. And I think that is sad. The reason that it upsets me is that it uses the legal process, a process in which I have a great deal of faith, a process that I think is incredibly important to each and every one of us in our society, in a way that, in my view, is deeply inappropriate. Why I think that the WCB is often better is because when we're talking about cost and we're talking about benefit, we need to keep in mind when we are speaking that the no-fault component of WCB is a massive benefit to workers. That is an incredibly important piece of the puzzle, and somehow it is being excluded, whether intentionally or not, from the conversation about this.

Mr. Speaker, I merely wanted to take the opportunity to rise and point out that that, I think, is something that is a very important factor. It's a factor that ought to be considered. It's a factor that ought to impact on every single one of us in this House.

Having now said my piece, I will take my place.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a brief question or comment. I see that the hon. Minister of Transportation has risen under 29(2)(a).

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was very interested in the comments about the no-fault policy of the Workers' Compensation Board. I think that there are a lot of Albertans that might take issue with that.

I did spend a period of time, Mr. Speaker, as the labour minister for this great province, and I remember – I know that our current labour minister is here looking at me intently now, wondering what's going to come out of my mouth next. But the fact is that during that time in my office there were many days when there were people lined up around the block all day every day with WCB complaints. I think that they would say that it's not a no-fault insurance.

I had one constituent that actually lost both of his legs in an accident and had to fight to get prostheses. In fact, Mr. Speaker, he got prostheses about 20 years ago. You can only imagine, as I can only imagine, how much better the technology is for prostheses 20 years later. The old ones were clearly worn out, and we had to fight like crazy for about a year to get replacements for that person. I'm not sure that that person would agree that WCB is a no-fault insurance.

Many other people are injured on the job where the WCB has told them that it's their own fault. I'm not sure that that really squares with what we just heard in this House about no-fault insurance, people whose lives had been ruined. I would wonder how the hon. member would reflect upon that and whether the hon. member that just spoke has had any – I'd be surprised if the hon. member didn't hear from some constituents in her riding about similar things. I think the hon. member probably takes meetings with her constituents, and her constituents are probably similar to mine in that she probably gets them on a regular basis telling the hon. member similar things to what I just recounted to this House.

I could go on with hundreds of other examples because I've heard hundreds of other examples, and, no, that's not an exaggeration. I'm sure our current labour minister gets a regular diet of similar stories, complaints, appeals into his office as well.

Mr. Speaker, I'd ask the member to think about the fact that many farmers, as our member talked about earlier, have not only WCB insurance but other insurance as well, and in many cases farmers and ranchers made it known to us that the WCB insurance was not as good as what they were already paying for.

I would ask the member also to reflect about the fact that probably a good part of the reason that the Official Opposition was very much removed from rural Alberta was the fallout from Bill 6. That wasn't the only thing. There was the carbon tax; there were a whole bunch of other reasons. But certainly Bill 6 is something that people in rural Alberta – to this day many of them will spit when they say "Bill 6" because they are so disgusted with the poor way that they were treated by the previous government, the poor attitude that they were addressed with when the previous government used phrases like "We are going to create a culture of safety," as if farmers in Alberta for a hundred years didn't care about their family and their friends that were helping them out on the farm and working for them. What an insult. What an insult, Mr. Speaker. I would ask the hon. member to think about those things.

4:50

You know what? The other thing, too, is that now, as the hon. member from our side who's a farmer said, we have sometimes farmers and ranchers that maybe don't have the physical ability currently to do some of the more dangerous jobs on the farm, which I've heard they actually are doing anyway because there's too much paperwork, after the NDP was finished, to make it worth their while. So they're doing things that they should be hiring other people to do, actually creating less safety.

Also, I'd ask them to think about the fact that we heard from the other side about how 12 families will have no coverage. Well, we don't know that. Those 12 families that the official leader over there talked about: there's a very good chance that those farmers and ranchers would have all had insurance other than WCB. We heard no mention from the other side about the 180,000 families without a paycheque after they were done in government. I didn't see any tears shed over there for their policies that caused all that to happen, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are back on the main bill, Bill 26. Is there anyone else wishing to add to the debate this afternoon?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question on second reading of Bill 26, the Farm Freedom and Safety Act, 2019.

[Motion carried; Bill 26 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Hanson in the chair]

The Acting Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 20
Fiscal Measures and Taxation Act, 2019

The Acting Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to Bill 20? The Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise to speak to the Fiscal Measures and Taxation Act, 2019, Bill 20. It's fairly difficult to keep track of what bills 20, 21, 22 do. This bill deals with 17 pieces of legislation, repeals five, creates two new ones. Certainly, I think that omnibus legislation pretty much is the norm for this government.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

I would remind the other side that when they were in opposition, they used to object even to related pieces of legislation such as workers' compensation or labour relations. But now, when they are in charge, they can put almost 17 pieces of legislation together which don't have much in common other than . . . [interjections]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, please continue.

Mr. Sabir: It amends or deals with 17 pieces of legislation, as I said. They have one thing in common, that all these changes that are brought through this Bill 20 take money away from the pockets of Albertans and give it to the $4.7 billion no-jobs corporate handout. That's what I find common in all these changes.

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

If we look at some of the things that they are doing with this piece of legislation, I think these things, whatever is in this piece of legislation, don't help us in any way, shape, or manner with jobs, the economy, and pipelines, which was their key slogan. For instance, if we talk about jobs, this piece of legislation ends all kinds of tax credits: the interactive digital media tax credit, the capital investment tax credit, the community economic development corporation tax credit, the Alberta investor tax credit, the scientific research and experimental development tax credit, the personal tuition tax credit, the personal education amount tax credit. Because of these tax credits, we were not only diversifying our economy, but these tax credits were attracting investment into Alberta, and they were creating jobs. Essentially, by removing these tax credits, this government is not only breaking their promise of creating jobs; rather, they are making us lose these jobs that were created by these tax credits or were going to be created by these tax credits.

Then the tuition tax credit that relates to postsecondary, advanced education: they are hiking the tuition fees on students all across this province, and on top of that, they are changing the tax credits. They are taking those tax credits away. They are charging more interest on outstanding student loans. Again, that will also shut down, make it difficult for students to seek postsecondary education. For many of us who are not born into wealth, education is the only way to get ahead or have a decent living. With these changes, I think this government is making it difficult for everyday Albertans to be able to attend postsecondary schools.

Then it also changes film and television tax credits. My colleague from Edmonton . . .

Ms Hoffman: Castle Downs.

Mr. Sabir: . . . Castle Downs has talked about it at length, that in our neighbouring jurisdiction, for instance, in B.C., these credits are way more than what we were offering, and they are bringing in way more revenue. They are attracting tourism. They are attracting these companies because of those credits. What we are seeing here is that these tax credits have been changed in a way that everybody in the industry is protesting against. They are not happy about this change, and they are of the view that this will stifle investment, that this will destroy our industry. Again, nobody is listening to the industry because they want to save some money so they can pay for their $4.7 billion no-jobs corporate gift.

Advanced Education, Environment and Parks, Health: there are many things that this piece of legislation is dealing with. They're eliminating the Access to the Future Fund Act, the environmental protection and enhancement fund, the Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Fund Act. The Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis Act: what they are doing is that they are, for instance, merging Alberta lottery funds into general revenue, and they are assuring Albertans that those funds will still be available to the organizations. The thing is that nobody wants to believe what this government says because they have said many things that they won't do, but they still went ahead and did those things anyway.

5:00

There are many examples. They said about AISH, the assured income for the severely handicapped, that they will not change that. In fact, they supported Bill 26 when brought forward by the previous government. What they did: they not only changed AISH; they deindexed it, taking $30 away from Albertans with disabilities, almost $380 per year, so that they can fund their policies like a $4.7 billion handout. Now, when they say that they are taking lottery funds and putting them in general revenue and telling organizations that these funds will be available to them, nobody wants to buy that argument because we have already seen an almost 35 per cent cut to CFEP, the community facility enhancement program, that many nonprofit community organizations and communities were using to build their centres, to build their cultural centres. From there they can provide services to the communities. They are cutting that one.

We have seen cuts to the CIP grant, the community initiatives program, and we haven't heard anything about antiracism grants. So when the government tells us that they're just moving the lottery fund into general revenue, nobody wants to trust this government because they have done things that they said they would not do. It's another thing that's of huge concern for organizations in our communities.

The Alberta cancer prevention legacy fund: they're also changing that one. We have heard from this government that they want the market to fix everything. They want market-based research, but I think that in this House there will be many people who have been impacted by cancer. Every year we see that there are many Albertans who are suffering from this, and having publicly funded research on the prevention of cancer is important. It's in the public interest. Taking that fund away I think is irresponsible. Again, that's not what Albertans voted for. What they voted for was jobs, the economy, and pipelines, and none of these things create any jobs. None of these things help us do anything with our economy or

pipelines. All it does is take money so that the government later can fund whatever they did in their job-creation tax act, where they gave $4.7 billion to corporations.

I think I already spoke briefly about the deindexing that they have done through this legislation. They have done that with the AISH program, deindexing of the AISH program. That's something around $30 per month, and if somebody is living on a limited income and, on top of that, they have a disability, that $30 makes a huge difference. The explanation the government gives: oh, it's not that onerous. If you are living on a limited income, certainly taking $380 away from them per year is onerous, and it's huge for those individuals.

It's also deindexing income support programs. It's also deindexing the seniors' benefit. Again, these are small increases, but for those who are receiving these increases, that sometimes is the only source of income that they have, and it matters to them. It's huge for them. This legislation is also taking that indexing, those increases, away from Albertans. It, again, will have huge impacts for those individuals who were relying on these services.

I note that they said that times are tough, so that's why they are doing it, but they didn't put any sunset provision on when this deindexing will be lifted, when they will start indexing these benefits again. There is no such assurance provided in this piece of legislation, and Albertans certainly are concerned how their only support is dealt with by this government. Again, while they're taking money away from Albertans with disabilities, while they're taking money away from seniors, while they're taking money away from those who are on income support, this government is also giving $4.7 billion in corporate handouts and wants Albertans to believe that that handout will somehow create jobs, against all kinds of academic advice and data that is available on those kinds of policies.

We have seen that kind of trickle-down economics fail everywhere around the globe. When we see that, like we saw the evidence here in Alberta, even companies like Husky, who got $233 million out of it, were not able to invest that in Alberta because the issues facing our industry are different. It's about takeaway capacity; it's not about their production capacity. Even if they invest, they will not have takeaway capacity in pipelines; they will not have access to markets to ship that product and sell those products. So they are giving that money to the corporations who will not have an opportunity to invest in our province, and they so far have done nothing to address takeaway capacity and market access issues.

Every day we are just told that there is a $30 million slush fund that is monitored and administered by a failed UCP candidate, Tom Olsen, that he will somehow use that fund anyway on Twitter and rapid response, those kinds of things, which will help us get a pipeline or will help us get market access. That didn't happen. Then we also gained access to only new markets. There is an inquiry going on, yet of the $2.5 million they have allocated, $900,000 went to the inquiry commissioner's son's law firm, where our Justice Minister worked formerly. These actions didn't do anything to help us with market access or new markets.

With all these cuts, all these changes that are brought forward by this Bill 20, I think there are possible consequences. Clearly, we can see that because of the changes contained in this piece of legislation, Albertans will be paying more in income taxes. This is also dealing with services that they are cutting. They are off-loading onto municipalities. As a result, municipalities either will have reduced services or higher property taxes. With the changes they are bringing forward to the investor tax credit, it looks like we will be losing jobs, we will be losing investment, and venture capital will move to other places.

Similarly, we are losing millions of dollars in the television and film industry and the jobs that come with that. Again, government policies are driving investment out of the province, driving investment and jobs away from the province. Similarly, the tech sector will be heading somewhere else if we are not providing the right environment for investment. Fewer companies will then be interested in our research and development and innovations in terms of green infrastructure because government policies clearly show they are not there to support these kinds of initiatives.

That's on the one hand. There are many important programs like CIP, CFEP, and antiracism grants that were helping communities to address issues facing them. For some of those organizations, these grants were the only source of funding they were getting from government through the lottery fund. Oftentimes these organizations do organize casino nights where they volunteer for the funds they receive. Now through this bill those funds, those lottery funds, have been merged into general revenue, and none of those organizations know whether or not they will get funding going forward.

Again, they're also meddling with the cancer research fund. That's a very personal issue for so many Albertans, and we as Albertans have a vested interest in investing in prevention research, life-saving research when it comes to cancer.

5:10

Again, less funding for environmental protection and enhancement. There were two major initiatives, one in Calgary and one in Edmonton, the green line and the LRT in Edmonton. Those were the projects that would help us with many issues that are facing our cities. They will help us with traffic congestion issues. They will help us to take more cars off the roads and provide environment-friendly transportation. They are moving funds around from those projects as well, which means that these projects could get delayed.

Again, this bill is over 100 pages long and deals with dozens of acts. There's never enough time to deal with each change on an individual basis, how they will impact our constituents. All I'll say is that for the most part, when you go through these changes, one theme is common. It's taking money away from Albertans, it's taking services away from Albertans, it's cutting into the services that Albertans rely on, all in the name of a $4.7 billion no-jobs handout, that has not created a single job. In fact, we have lost 27,000 jobs under this government's watch. I think we saw 1,000 jobs lost just last week in Calgary, so clearly government policies are not working, and with the changes they are bringing through this piece of legislation, they are taking what Albertans have.

I will not be supporting this legislation. I believe the changes contained in this legislation will hurt Albertans. They will have an adverse impact on my constituents and Albertans across this province. These are the services that Albertans need and rely on. I think that nothing is safe from this government when it comes to cuts. For instance, when we became government, Alberta was the only province that didn't have an Alberta child tax benefit. In 2015 we brought forward that child tax benefit. If your income was below $43,295, you were able to get that benefit. Now they have changed that base threshold to $41,000, meaning that there will be families who will not be able to access that. Before, if it was 165,000 Albertan families who were able to access that benefit; with this change only 55,000 would be able to.

The Chair: Hon. members, is there anyone else wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to rise today and speak to Bill 20, the Fiscal Measures

and Taxation Act, 2019. You know, it's become incredibly clear over the two legislative sessions that we've had so far that in their election platform this government, the United Conservative Party of Alberta, misled Albertans. It was an utterly disingenuous document. In putting it forward, it was engaging in an elaborate shell game. It was playing hide and seek with the facts, concealing actual intent, and they were being a good deal less than forthright with Albertans. Indeed, I would say that that document was not honest with Albertans about what this government intended to do. Bill 20 is a prime example of that. You know, it's somewhat surprising because, Madam Chair, as I'm sure you're familiar, the UCP policy platform was 118 pages long – 118 pages. Indeed, this Premier and members of this government like to brag about the incredible detail that they put in their policy platform and what a massive mandate it gives to them, but in Bill 20 we have a number of pieces which they did not see fit to include.

So if they were so scrupulous, Madam Chair, in putting together this policy platform and ensuring that they wanted to let Albertans know everything they intended to do, then I can only assume that there was ignorance involved in the creation of that document as to actually what needed to be done and what they intended to do or there was a good deal of that policy platform itself that was incredibly dishonest.

Let's have a look here at what we have in Bill 20 and the incredible dishonesty that was contained in the UCP policy platform. Let's start with the cancellation of education and tuition tax credits. Now, Madam Chair, I recognize for many members of this Assembly, particularly those who've served in government before and many who perhaps are serving now as ministers, the times when they had to depend on a tuition tax credit are a bit of a distant memory for them, which perhaps makes it easier for them to foist this burden on students. They can file that away in the dusty catacombs of their memory, the times when they themselves took advantage of those very same credits to pay for their education, of when they took advantage of the significant subsidy that there was from government at the time and the, indeed, much lower proportion of tuition that students would have had to pay, so that they can excuse the fact that they are taking $20 million out of the pockets of Alberta students and their families this year alone.

Madam Chair, I can tell you that it was not that long ago that I returned to school to earn my bachelor of arts in professional communications. I can tell you that as I worked full-time and attended school full-time and took out lines of credit to cover the cost of my schooling, those tuition tax credits made a significant difference. They allowed me to upgrade my laptop when my old one was failing, and given that I was taking an online program, that was pretty significant for me. That is an expense I could not have afforded otherwise and would've had a significant impact on my education. But these government members are willing to callously disregard this burden that they're placing on students at the same time as they are, in fact, raising tuition rates for students across the province. They are making school more expensive and then taking away some of these small amounts from income tax credits that students had access to, to help defray the cost of their tuition and the cost of their books.

That was not in the UCP policy platform, Madam Chair. I dare say that if they had gone forward to their constituents or when they had sat down and met with postsecondary students and said that that was their intent of what they would want to do, that would not have been met with much good cheer or support, so they chose to allow their policy platform to be utterly dishonest with Albertans about their intent to do that. The average student will pay $600 a year more thanks to this government just from this change. That doesn't count the extra amounts they'll be paying in tuition.

The child and family benefit tax credit, Madam Chair: this government is merging what were two separate benefits that existed previously, the Alberta child benefit, which our government introduced, and the already existing Alberta family employment tax credit, which our government increased. We saw the impact of that over the time we were in government, with a 50 per cent reduction in child poverty in the province of Alberta. Now, that was not the work of those programs brought forward and invested in by our government alone; that was also the federal Canada child benefit program. But that had a significant impact on low-income families in the province of Alberta.

5:20

I would dare say that if we want to see a general improvement in our economy, then lifting people out of poverty is a very good way to do that. People, when they are lifted out of poverty, depend on fewer government services. They require fewer community supports. They are able to move into better paying jobs. Their health improves. It lowers costs in every area of our society. It improves what people are able to contribute.

Now, the thing is, Madam Chair, that there are challenges as people find that path out of poverty, right? It's kind of like if you're helping someone out who's stuck in the mud, so you're giving them that hand, you're reaching out, you're helping to lift them out. If you pull them halfway out and then let go, they're quite likely to fall back in.

What we have happening here, with the Alberta child benefit now being merged with the Alberta family employment tax credit to create the child and family benefit tax credit, is that on the surface it looks like a good thing in that it will increase benefits for the lowest income families by 15 per cent. To that, Madam Chair, I will indeed say kudos to this government. That is a respectable thing to do. That will help those families more and, indeed, will help contribute to moving that other 50 per cent out of child poverty. However, the new benefit phases the benefit out more quickly as incomes rise. As a result, there will be $40 million less overall going out to Alberta families because about 55,000 Alberta families are going to lose this benefit entirely.

Now, again, Madam Chair, one of the things we recognized as a government was that it's not enough to just get people part of the way out of poverty and then let them drop. You need to help get them completely back on their feet and up and rolling. That's why when we brought in the first actual provincial housing strategy that we had in the province of Alberta, one of the adjustments we made was allowing people to be able to stay in affordable housing, government-subsidized housing for longer. What we found and what we had heard back from our partners, stakeholders in the community is that when individuals were forced out too quickly, they did not land on their feet. In fact, they would have a more difficult time and oftentimes would end up falling back. Individuals needed greater support for a longer time to be able to amass the money they might need to make a down payment on a home or to buy that second vehicle that allows them to be a two-income household, or take other steps that, in fact, put them in a place of fiscal stability.

But what this government is doing is choosing to cut those families off sooner, much as this government is now choosing to cut off youth who turn 22, instead of at the age of 24. To save a few dollars, Madam Chair, this government is choosing to place people's hard-won progress in jeopardy. That's of no benefit to us as a society. That's of no benefit to us as an economy. It's of benefit, I suppose, to the government backfilling their $4.7 billion corporate no-jobs giveaway, but it is not prudent social policy. And it was not in the UCP policy platform, which so badly misled Albertans.

The Edmonton Social Planning Council noted this particular change. When I speak with community agencies and folks that are serving those who are living in or are on their way out of poverty, they are not encouraged by this government or that this policy is being brought forward without any consultation, without any prior notice, and indeed at a time when government is pulling back on funding for so many other things which help to address the issues that these families face, placing in jeopardy the great progress we have begun to make as a province. But you know, Madam Chair, the educational and tuition tax credits, the changes to the child and family benefit, family employment tax credit: the cherry on this government's sundae of disingenuity has to be their changes to personal income tax.

Now, thinking back to this past spring, Madam Chair, the Premier, then the Alberta opposition leader, told Global News that he would not be making any changes to personal income tax rates, okay? The article goes on to note that he said that the United Conservatives would delay any tax changes until the budget was balanced. Okay. Well, it seems quite clear now that that statement he made was far from straight with Albertans. Indeed, I would suggest that it was decidedly crooked. On hearing the Premier's remarks at that time, I think it would be fair for anyone listening to infer that any honest person making that kind of a claim would in fact mean that they had no intent of asking Albertans to pay more income tax. Government members like to talk about how plain-spoken they are and how plain-spoken folks in their area are. They like to talk about severely normal Albertans. I think if you presented any of those individuals with those two statements by the Premier, they would say: that is a man who is promising that I will not pay more income tax.

But in Bill 20 we see that was not in fact the case. At best this government is breaking that Premier's word and breaking the promise and at worst the Premier was being, shall I say, incredibly precious, rather smugly clever, utterly disingenuous with his choice of words. Of course, that's what we've seen with this government, Madam Chair. They do not speak plainly with Albertans. They do not deal honestly. We've seen that here in this House last week with their massive omnibus bill, Bill 22, which, again, contained many elements this government did not campaign on, had never introduced before, and which they rammed through at lightning speed without consultation or discussion with any Albertans. This government is not interested in speaking honestly with Albertans.

However much the government members may choose to sit here and try to convince themselves otherwise, that myself and my colleagues were such terrible people and did such a horrible job in government . . . [interjections]

The Chair: Hon. members, my apologies. Can we just turn the volume down a little bit on the chatter? It's very loud. Thank you.

Please proceed.

Mr. Shepherd: . . . that this level of disingenuity, that this level of antidemocracy, that these sorts of deceptive choices are justified.

Well, if government members want to choose to delude themselves in that, I suppose that is their choice, but I would note that when it comes to the question of personal income tax, the Premier, before he was the Premier, indeed, before he was the Official Opposition leader, was very clear about what he thought about deindexing income tax. To be clear, the government's own documents show exactly what this is, stating, "With the need to control spending, continuing to index these benefits is unaffordable for the time being. Alberta will resume indexing the tax system once economic and fiscal conditions can support it."

Clearly, they are changing income tax despite their promise, and they will be forcing roughly 2 million Albertans who pay income tax to pay more, $600 million more. The Premier, before he was Premier, before he was Leader of the Official Opposition, had made the promise that he would do no such thing, and made it quite clear what he thought of bracket creep, that it was a pernicious tax on inflation, an insidious tax on inflation, a hidden tax grab, a backdoor tax increase, a serious systemic flaw in our tax system, and that bracket creep constituted an annual tax increase.

5:30

So despite this government's repeated and utterly disingenuous claims that they are not raising income taxes for Albertans, Madam Chair, they are, in their Premier's own words, once again something that was not contained within the UCP policy platform, which was clearly, decidedly dishonest with Albertans. They were sold a false bill of goods. They were presented with a menu with many items they didn't know they were going to be served.

We've seen this time and time again on so many fronts with this government, Madam Chair. Indeed, Albertans weren't asking for $16,000 charter flights. They weren't asking for sweetheart deals in their energy war room. That wasn't in the platform either, much as all these other things which I am noting in this legislation were not present in that platform. They weren't told they would be served a side of entitlement and arrogance with a distinct flavour of the bygone Redford PC era. That was not included on the menu. Certainly, recently we've noticed a distinct bouquet of corruption wafting up from the actions of this government and the legislation it's choosing to bring forward, like this bill which we are debating here in the House today, Bill 20, the Fiscal Measures and Taxation Act, 2019. I can only wonder, Madam Chair, at the disregard in which this government holds Albertans and which each of these government members is choosing to make themselves a party to.

Again, they can sit and try to convince themselves that I am the deluded one and that I and all of my government colleagues are the awful, terrible people that perhaps they're being told behind closed doors that we are to help them stomach the passage of a bill like Bill 22. I can tell you that I speak to a pretty wide breadth of Albertans across this province, and while I recognize that there are Albertans that support this government and will continue to support these policies, even as disgusting as I may find some of them – the decisions of the government, to be clear, Madam Chair, because this government also likes to be rather disingenuous about how it quotes the *Hansard*, so I'll be very clear on that: the disgusting decisions being made by this government. I respect all Albertans regardless of what political choice they may choose to make.

Certainly, if they wish to take this government at their word, that is their right, but I can tell you that an increasing number of Albertans are unable to do that, not at a time when government is seizing their pensions without consultation, not at a time when this government breaks contracts with front-line workers, not at a time when this government fires the Election Commissioner.

The Chair: Hon. members, are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise tonight to speak to Bill 20, the Fiscal Measures and Taxation Act, 2019. I want to start by saying that I've spoken to this before in the House because this is something that – my community is reaching out to me to express concerns, whether it's parent groups, whether it's community leagues. Then, of course, being the culture critic – this is something that the film industry is very upset and concerned about. So I would just like to share some of the letters of concern

that I've been receiving through my office, whether it's directly to me or whether I'm being CCed on a letter that perhaps has come to the attention of the Premier's office or other members that are in this Chamber. We have received a lot of correspondence.

One that I would like to highlight tonight is from the Edmonton Castle Downs Recreation Society, the CDRS. It's an organization that has compiled within it several community leagues that both myself, as the member representing the beautiful community of Edmonton-Castle Downs, and my colleague the Member for Edmonton-North West – we share community leagues that come together under this organization. I have to say, Madam Chair, that they are an absolutely essential part of north Edmonton. They do so much to give back to our community, and they are involved in so many aspects to ensure that the amazing community of Edmonton north is taken care of.

They wrote a letter, Madam Chair, and I would like to share that letter. It's addressed to the Premier. It says:

> Community leagues are groups of neighbours who volunteer to organize events, activities, and programs in their local neighbourhood, who plan and build local amenities and who advocate for the services they need to make their community thrive. They represent and are supported by community members of all backgrounds, faiths, and political spectrums. Community leagues help people live active, connected lives, combatting social isolation and promoting inclusion and engagement.
>
> The Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues, the EFCL, serves as an umbrella organization to connect, represent and enable community leagues to preserve and promote the community league way of life. The EFCL and Edmonton's 160 community leagues have serious concerns about funding cuts in Bill 20.
>
> With Bill 20, the Fiscal Measures and Taxation Act, the provincial government of Alberta plans to make changes to the lottery fund as well as cutting funding by more than a third for an essential grant project for community leagues, the community facility enhancement program, CFEP. This funding is what allows community leagues to build and maintain vital recreational infrastructure such as community halls, ice rinks, playgrounds, basketball and tennis courts. Because Edmonton's community leagues have their facilities on licensed land, they are currently restricted in the ways that they can fund raise for them. Many grants that community leagues are eligible for are matching grants, which match funds obtained through programs such as CFEP. This makes CFEP an essential source of funds.
>
> Over half a billion dollars worth of community-based infrastructure exists thanks to community leagues, in partnership with the city of Edmonton and the province of Alberta. For close to 100 years Edmonton's community leagues have built hundreds of amenities, including 126 community league halls, 250 playgrounds, 119 outdoor community ice rinks, 55 water spray parks, 46 basketball court facilities, 25 community gardens, 24 outdoor tennis court facilities, 10 BMX-skateboard tracks.
>
> Under Bill 20 significantly fewer community leagues will be able to access CFEP. This threatens not only community league facilities but also the programs and events they house and the collective community way of life. Without the ability to build and maintain community halls, community leagues will not be able to host programs and activities for all ages. Existing facilities in need of renovations to ensure accessibility will remain inaccessible to community members. Playgrounds will fall into disrepair and become unsafe for children to use. Some community leagues may need to cease operation as they lack funds to make critical investments in infrastructure.
>
> Community leagues depend on CFEP funding for the ongoing repairs and renovations needed to ensure that these neighbourhood amenities provide vibrant and safe places for neighbours to gather. Cuts to this program will have a devastating and lasting impact on communities and neighbourhoods within the capital city.
>
> We look forward to hearing from you on how you plan to help community leagues maintain their operations and preserve the community league way of life in Edmonton.
>
> Sincerely,
>
> Lynette Thompson, president of the CDRS.

Now, Madam Chair, this is something that I know not just the CDRS has been concerned about. These are conversations that are happening all across our communities. They rely heavily on the supports and resources and programming that community leagues offer.

5:40

I know that in my community of Castle Downs they host things like movie nights, where families can get together and watch movies and have popcorn and have snacks. They do things like cartoon breakfasts, where everybody gets in their jammies and they go sit in the community hall, watch cartoons, and eat cereal. We have skating in almost all of our communities, which is run by incredibly tireless volunteers that give up their time so that they can have kids actively participating in something that we thrive on here in Alberta as a recreational pastime, playing hockey, or just simply being out on the ice, skating.

There are several of the community leagues that, because of the generous donations of those in our community, offer skates to those that don't have skates. There are children and adults that will come out to Lorelei and skate for the first time. I know that I was so honoured to be able to help a three-year-old, Maggie, learn how to skate for the very first time. She was wobbly, and she looked a little bit like Bambi, but it was because the community league offered the arena and they offered the space to do that and the skates for kids to come and try that she was able to skate for the first time. She was cold, but she had fun. She had a smile on her face, and it was an incredible experience.

To know that there are so many families across this province that rely on the investment from our province, from our provincial government, to be able to maintain these facilities – it's very concerning to me that this is something that is being taken away. I know that we have Christmas celebrations in our community leagues. We have different Ramadan celebrations that are occurring. We have such an inclusive community in Edmonton-Castle Downs, where people of all ages, people of all different backgrounds – and it gives them an opportunity to come together as a community. That's their common interest in Edmonton and, I'm sure, across the entire province. The Castle Downs Rec Society strives to ensure that there is inclusivity in our community, and they work very, very hard at doing that, and they take incredible pride in our community leagues.

We have so many volunteers across Edmonton-Castle Downs that have been participating at the community league level for, sometimes, over 35, 40 years. They started when their children were young. They perhaps wanted to volunteer because their child was participating in a sports program like soccer, so as a way to kind of reduce some of the fees, they volunteered, and now they have grandchildren and they are still involved in the community. Hearing that history and the passion that it brings, knowing that this bill is going to cut those monies that are so heavily relied on in our communities is just devastating.

Knowing that there are going to be facilities that might actually have to close down because there might be a major repair that's needed and they're no longer eligible for that funding – it's devastating to think that somewhere where you could just walk across the street to access your park or the ice rink might be gone.

It's something that's going to impact so many Albertans. I know that when we look at the importance of community, it's something that is really strong in Alberta. As a community we come together, and we support each other, and we take care of each other.

What I'm seeing happening right now, Madam Chair, is that so many across the province are coming together to fight what's happening with this current government. They're afraid, they're concerned, and they're rallying together. They're coming to the steps of this Legislature to speak against these drastic, senseless cuts when we know that it's because they put a $4.7 billion corporate tax giveaway without creating any jobs. It's at the expense of our communities. It's at the expense of those family members that so heavily rely on things that are happening right next door.

I know that as a mom I often spent time at the community leagues of my kids, whether they were taking cooking lessons – during spring break there were playschools that were offered through the community leagues. At my children's community league they have so many different fun things happening. We're looking at ways to engage adults in it, so one of the community leagues does a paint night, and it's very, very successful.

I know that our community league has reached out to the community of Edmonton-Castle Downs and Edmonton-North West to survey them about: what do they want? They're incredibly engaged in reaching out to community to find out what the needs of the community members are, and we heard loud and clear that they want activities. People want to be able to engage in their community leagues across Edmonton north. To be able to provide those services and to be able to rely on government for support is essential, and we're hearing that we're at risk of losing this. To me, that just is something that is so wrong. There are so many people that are organizing, coming together to speak out about it.

The other piece of this incredible, huge piece of legislation that I would also like to touch on is the film industry. As the culture critic we've heard, I've heard, my side of the House has heard incredible concern with what this government has been doing in terms of the impacts on the film industry. We've heard that they hadn't been consulted with prior to the budget coming out. They weren't consulted on this piece of legislation and the impact on them. We're hearing across the province that what's happening is that production and very, very talented people in the film industry are leaving the province of Alberta because of the decisions that this government has made.

When we're debating the amendment, which I appreciate, from the government to this bill, it speaks to the ability to actually open up applications. In the way it was written prior to the amendment, applications wouldn't be able to be processed until at least April 1, 2020. Industry was saying that that is absolutely going to collapse their industry here in the province. After some really well-attended meetings in Calgary and having had the estimates attended, film finally was able to get a meeting with the minister. The unfortunate thing is that this happened after Bill 20 had been introduced and after the budget had been introduced, which is too late when we're looking at ways that the industry needs to be supported.

We know that having a tax credit is absolutely essential, and we know that the industry wants more than that. They want the cap to be taken away on this. They've been asking for that, yet the amendment didn't include that piece of it. It included a small piece, which I was happy to support, but it's not enough. Part of this bill is still not doing enough and causing millions and millions to be lost in the industry in jobs and investment here in the province of Alberta. You hear industry folks talk with passion about what they do and how they want to stay in the province. They love where they live, they love doing content about Alberta, and they love the fact that we have such a beautiful landscape.

We have some of the most educated and professional crews in the world, Madam Chair, and knowing that decisions from this government are putting those projects at risk is devastating. Hearing people come to me and express concern that they might have to leave the province of Alberta because of the impact that this government is making on the film industry is devastating. They don't want to leave. They want to be able to stay here. But when you look next door, to our neighbours in B.C., who are thriving in their film industry, in order to have a job that pays for your family, that can put a roof over your head and food on your table, you have to go to where the jobs are. For a government that was saying that their number one goal is to create jobs in the province, they haven't created a stable environment for the film industry. People are leaving.

What that means is that millions of dollars that should be invested into this province are leaving, going to other provinces, and this isn't the only industry that the government's decisions are impacting. We know that people are coming to the government with solutions. They have ideas, and they're reaching out, expressing concerns. The government is not listening. We're listening, and we're paying attention, and we're going to continue to fight for what the industry wants. I know several of my colleagues on this side of the House have been fierce advocates here, talking about the importance of the film industry. They're meeting with stakeholders. They're meeting with those that have so many great ideas. We're pleading with the government to listen and to make change because once the film industry leaves the province of Alberta, it's very unlikely that they're going to come back.

5:50

I have a letter that I would like to read, Madam Chair, from an IATSE member. She writes:

> Dear Ms. Goehring,
>
> Thank-you for coming to the ASIAC meeting this afternoon.
>
> I am a member of IATSE 212, and work in the Costume department.
>
> It is positive to see that the Film Industry has been moved to the Economic Development, Trade & Tourism Ministry, and that the government has decided to move towards the Tax Incentive instead of the grant system, as we are a business. I am however puzzled, as to why the incentive was capped. According to Damian Petti, president of IATSE 212, the current $45 million cap generates 12-15 projects with budgets over $3 million, for over $300 million in production. Dropping the annual cap down to $15 million would only incentivize 2 or 3 large projects and we would lose several hundred million dollars' worth of production. Unlike in other industries, this tax rebate is paid out 1 year after the production has finished, not up front. The product is already delivered, the money is spent, so there isn't any risk to the Government with this investment.
>
> The film industry has real economic benefits in that the money is spent in the community. In 2014, I worked on a large historical TV Mini-Series. I worked as a buyer in the Costume Department and I was 1 of 6 people buying for our department. At the height of production I was spending around $30,000 weekly at local businesses. I was 1 person in 1 department. Many of the vendors were small businesses, who were in turn able to continue to employ staff. This is one small aspect of the monies spent on a production. I should also mention that due to the nature of the projects we attract, we are often filming all over the province. Economic benefits reach across this province, from hotels and catering, local services such as porta-potties and tent rentals, antique shops and lumber yards, and so on. I have been

> on several productions where the director has opened up a tab at the local coffee shop and told the crew to have a coffee on them. When you have crews on set of 200+, this is a nice little payday for the local businesses. It all adds up.
>
> On a personal note, since becoming a member in the Union in 2014, I have been able to qualify for a mortgage and purchase a little townhouse. Perhaps the biggest ramification of the exodus of film productions for myself, is that when I need to renew my mortgage I will no longer qualify and will lose my housing. I am born and raised in Alberta, and have parents in their 70's and 80's. I would like to be able to spend their last years in the same city as them, not be forced to move elsewhere.
>
> I find it frustrating that, with the current economic climate in Alberta, and the Government's own stated desire to diversify economically, they fail to see this for the economic boon this could be. Obviously work needs to happen in other areas of the economy (oil and gas, agriculture), but the Film Industry could take some pressure off the Province, in the form of positive cash flow, while work is done to begin to resolve these other areas.
>
> In 2017/18, the total volume of film and television production in Alberta was $255 million, while in BC was $3.5 Billion and Ontario was $2.8 billion. While we will probably never be at the level of Vancouver, I just don't understand why, in this economy . . .

Thank you.

The Chair: Hon. members, are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I just have a couple of moments here to say a few words around Bill 20. I mean, indeed, there are so many different pieces to this bill that it's worth while to take some separation, to separate the comments, to perhaps focus on one topic at a time. The topic that I would like to just say a few words about is the change to the personal income tax brackets that this Bill 20 is proposing, which is to allow what is known as bracket creep to take place in personal income tax here in the province of Alberta. This is, by the government's own estimation, going to cost Alberta taxpayers about $600 million over the term.

You know, there are about 2 million Albertans who pay income tax in any given year here in the province of Alberta, and taking off the indexation of taxes is a significant increase in personal income tax in this budget. I know that a lot of the UCP strategy over these last few weeks is to deny the existence of these things in the budget, but here it is in black and white, very clear, that the deindexation of taxation will cost Alberta taxpayers about $600 million.

You know, this is one of these slow-burn things, Madam Chair, because it takes place over time. People do their taxes, and you slowly come to realize over time that "Hey, our taxes have gone up" and that they've gone up quite significantly over time. I mean, certainly, you know, it's fair that people pay taxes for the goods and services that we provide on a municipal level, on a provincial level, and on a federal level, but this whole idea of reducing taxes, that the UCP seems to like to run on, is absolutely not true. Here in this bill that we're debating right now is an increase to personal income taxes for all Albertans, starting now, as soon as this gets passed. I mean, I find this to be disingenuous. I find it to be certainly difficult for people, and they need to get their head around it.

You know, it affects not just all Albertans, but I think it also puts pressure on other levels of government because, of course, there's only one taxpayer, Madam Chair, and now taking more money from that single taxpayer for this provincial level of governance also puts pressures on other levels of government, specifically municipalities, and on the responsibilities and the expectations that are being put on them with reduced budgets from the same Bill 20 as well.

You know, I find it to be quite surprising, Madam Chair, if you look at this. Of course, our Premier was previously a cabinet member and in opposition in the national government, and he spoke long and very eloquently, when he was in the federal government, about how dishonest it is to deindex taxation on a personal level. But obviously he was learning these tricks very well because now he's imported this idea from Ottawa, turned it upside down, and did this very thing to Albertans in this budget, increasing their personal income taxes by deindexing the tax brackets that are used. People call it a tax creep, right? Yeah, I think it's certainly a tax creep, and it's creepy, too, quite frankly, that someone would be so disingenuous as to suggest that they are lowering taxes or not going to increase people's taxes and, lo and behold, there it is.

I'm curious to know, Madam Chair, as people travel around and receive feedback from their constituents across the province, how they manage to sell this one, that this UCP government is increasing your personal income taxes with Bill 20 by deindexing tax brackets. I'm sure that people will bring it up because, you know, it flies in the face of all the rhetoric and language that we heard for so many months and years from the same government, talking about how you want to decrease taxes and liberate people's taxes or whatever language they like to use, and here you see the very opposite. They're decreasing taxes for corporate income tax, certainly for profitable corporations, to the tune of $4.7 billion. That puts a big hole in this provincial budget.

The Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt. The Committee of the Whole will be recessed until 7:30 this evening.

[The committee adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:
Managing Editor
Alberta Hansard
3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St
EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7
Telephone: 780.427.1875

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